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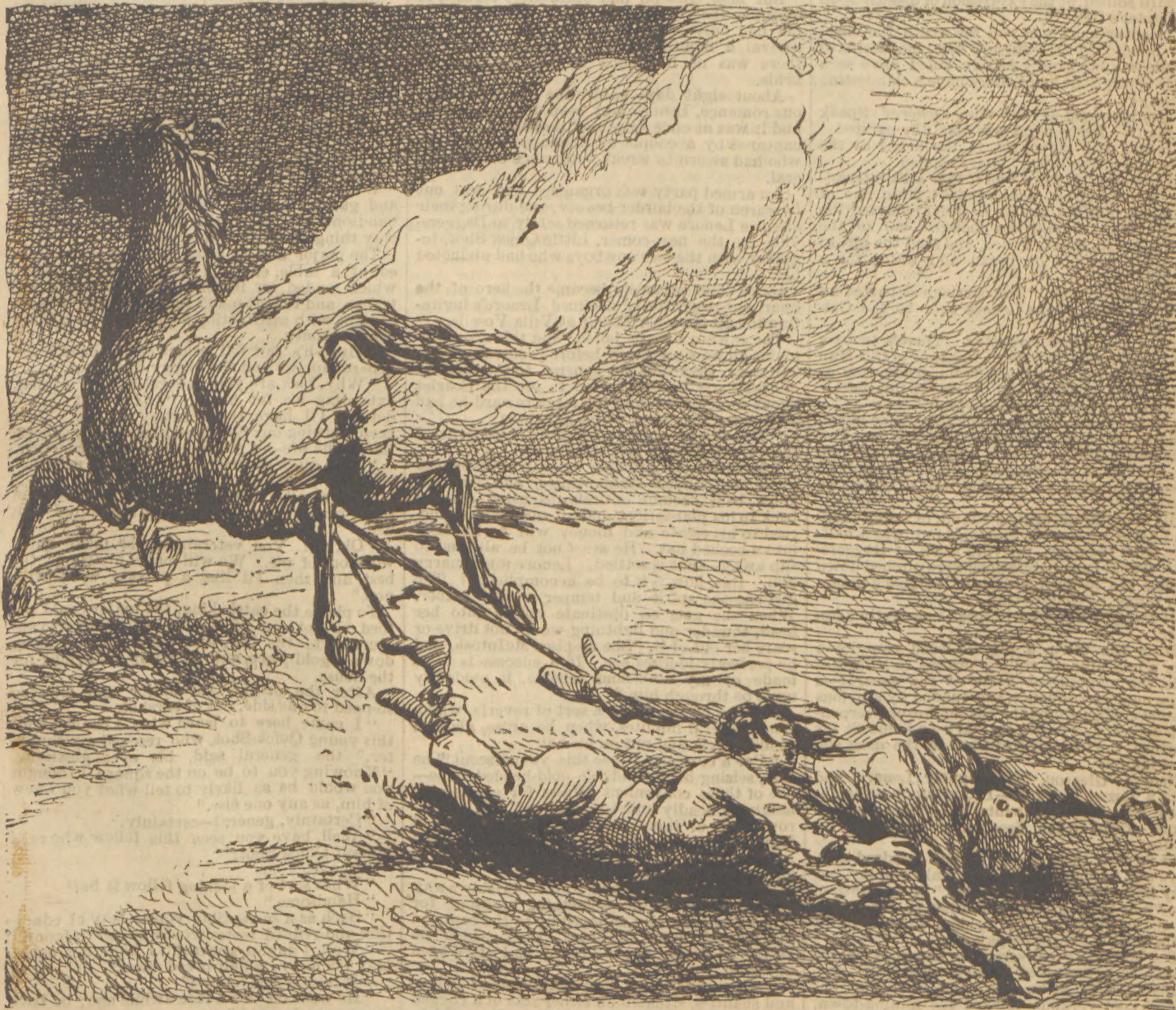
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No. 330.

LITTLE QUICK-SHOT, THE SCARLET SCOUT; Or, THE DEAD FACE OF DAGGERSVILLE.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "DENVER DOLL" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.



AWAY! AWAY! THE TERRIFIED ANIMAL PLUNGED, LEAVING A SHEET OF WEIRD LIGHT BEHIND—A SIGNAL-LIGHT TO QUICK SHOT'S
AND GRIT GLEASON'S HORRIBLE DOOM.

Little Quick-Shot, THE SCARLET SCOUT;

OR,

The Dead Face of Daggersville.

BY E. L. WHEELER,
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BUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE INSULT.

"PEDRO!"

"Yes, general!"

"Who is this fellow, who rescued Lenore from the cowboys, a week since?"

"I know not, general, except that he is a wandering ranger, and is known, at the camp as Little Quick-Shot, the Scarlet Scout."

"From what does he derive so strange a title?"

"I believe he is counted the most unerring shot on the range, sir, either with rifle or revolver; then, too, he has a peculiarity of wearing a magnificent buckskin suit which is dyed the brightest scarlet color."

"Undoubtedly some good-for-nothing vagabond, with a penchant for notoriety, and cheap whisky!" the general said angrily, as he bit savagely at the end of a half-smoked cheroot. "What is more, Pedro, I hear that Lenore has been twice to Daggersville this week, ostensibly to do shopping, but in reality to meet this tramp."

Pedro smiled, at the expression of disgust upon his master's face.

"Hearsay has given you the truth for once, sir," he said. "Of course, I have no desire to meddle in your family affairs, but I have seen Little Quick-Shot and Lenore have a clandestine meeting!"

"Ten thousand devils! when—where? Speak up, man!" The general was fearfully excited.

"It was last night, sir, in the arbor at the lower end of the lawn," Pedro replied.

"Curse myself for a fool if this isn't interesting. My daughter, a descendant from one of the finest families in old Kentucky, playing the lovely with a nameless mongrel cur of the prairies! Go, quick, Pedro, and send the girl to me. I'll put her on bread and water for a week!"

"Beg pardon, sir. The carriage departed an hour ago, taking Miss Lenore over to the Cottonwoods."

"Ah! yes; I had forgotten. There's to be a sort of reception *fete* there, in honor of Old Man Ronald's son coming back from graduation at Yale. Well, let the girl go. I'll see to this matter of the scout, later. You can go."

And the general leaned back in his easy-chair, to finish his cigar, while Pedro left the room.

General Gleason was an ex-Confederate officer, and one of the richest of the "cattle-kings," in southern Colorado, at the time of which we write.

His magnificent prairie island, of many thousand acres of superb grazing land, was a half-mile from the quiet, thriving town of Daggersville, whose rude habitations were pitched down among the lower foot-hills of the hoary mountain range, at Grizzly Gap.

Of Daggersville we will speak more fully hereafter.

From the town, a private road ran down over a half-mile of rolling prairie to Villa Vosselle, the magnificent home of the general—a large modern residence, surrounded by spacious grounds, with abundant shade, flowers, serpentine drives, and costly statuary—a home fit for a prince, the interior furnished in the most elegant manner.

General Gleason, his daughter Lenore, and half a dozen servants—Pedro among them—were the only occupants of this sumptuous home, except when frequently honored with visitors.

To be sure, there was a full half-hundred cowboys and herdsmen in the general's employ, but they had a special "settlement," or habitation, known as the Barracks, ten miles to the south, on the cattle-range, and seldom showed up at Villa Vosselle except on pay-day.

The foregoing conversation occurred in the general's well-stocked library, where the general was seated at an open window, looking out upon a cool veranda toward the mining-town, upon which the dying sunlight of a hot August day was just waning.

He was not a homely man—this fiery, hot-

blooded Southerner, who had fought through the entire four years of the great struggle in the Confederate service.

He was tall and of commanding build, with broad chest and shoulders, and a haughty, soldierly bearing.

His face was more stern than kindly in expression, and was well covered with short-cropped, iron-gray beard, while his hair was still more silvery. His eyes were gray and eagle-like in their glance, and a high, well-shaped forehead denoted that he was a man of pronounced intellectual strength.

His face still wore an angry expression after Pedro departed, for it galled his proud spirit—this rumor that his daughter, the queenly Lenore, at whose shrine the best men of Washington had bowed but a season before, should even notice a common rover of the mountain and prairie.

Ambitious views had the general for the disposal of his daughter.

Up in Daggersville, temporarily stopping at the Cinnamon Bear Hotel, was an old friend of the general's—Colonel McIntosh by name—a relic of the Confederacy, as it were, sixty years old, gray-haired, pinch-faced, red-nosed, and the possessor of but one eye and one leg; yet of highly-aristocratic lineage, with a bank account of a quarter of a million, and one of the most extensive and profitable cotton-plantations on the Red river.

Hence the colonel had been decided upon for Lenore, by her business-like and practical parent.

And Colonel Zack McIntosh had come to Daggersville for the purpose of taking the fair Lenore back with him as his wife.

But Miss Gleason had obstinately refused to assent to the arrangement, and where the colonel had only expected to stay a week after his arrival, a month had already passed, and still there was no likelihood of his securing his bride.

About eight days before the day that opens our romance, Lenore had been found missing, and it was at once suspected that she had been captured by a couple of discharged cowboys, who had sworn to wreak vengeance on the general.

An armed party was organized and sent out in search of the border beauty, and during their absence Lenore was returned safely to Daggersville by the new-comer, Little Quick-Shot, together with the two cowboys who had abducted her.

Quick-Shot naturally became the hero of the hour, but respectfully declined Lenore's invitation to call upon her father at Villa Vosselle.

The cowboys were jailed; and this about explains all now necessary before proceeding with our story, save that the general, to the surprise of every one, had neglected to see the Scarlet Scout and tender him the large reward he had offered for the rescue of his daughter.

"This is a pretty state of affairs," the general fumed, after Pedro left the library.

"McIntosh is growing impatient over the girl's confounded stubbornness, and first we know, he'll become entirely disgusted and go back to his plantation, and all my plans to succeed to his estate and money will be knocked into a cocked hat. He *must* not be allowed to slip away—that is settled. Lenore *must* marry him. But, how is it to be accomplished? The girl has the spirit and temper of her father. When she gets an obstinate notion into her head, thunder and lightning would not drive or scare her out of it. She despises McIntosh, and he perfectly idolizes her. If a success is to be made of my ambitious scheme, it evidently must be through him."

He then relapsed into a sort of reverie, which lasted several minutes, when he arose, glanced at his watch, and put on his hat.

"I've a curiosity to see this young scout!" he said, seizing his formidable gold-headed cane—one of those convenient affairs for gentlemen, holding a deadly bullet in one end and a narrow flask of liquor in the other. "I credited Lenore with extraordinary good taste, therefore I should naturally expect to find this fellow a very paragon among men."

He left the house, and walked briskly away toward Daggersville—something unusual for him, as he generally galloped up to the camp on his spirited roan, Kentucky, than which no better or fleetier horse existed had often been his boast.

Daggersville was a little collection of cabins and shanties, situated on either side of a rugged stage-trail at the mouth of Grizzly Gap which, at this point, split the towering mountain-range asunder.

There were not over a couple of hundred inhabitants, mostly knights of the pick and shovel, the remainder being gamblers or shopkeepers, barring a small sprinkling of women and children.

Excepting a few private "patches," which yielded but a meager profit, two quartz mines formed the main support of the miners who populated Daggersville, and both of these mines were owned by a company, the chief stockholder of which was a wealthy ranchero, Old Man Roland, as he was called, he being president of the company, and owning a controlling interest.

Besides the private shanties, were a couple of stores, a laundry, smithy, and a well-kept hotel, known as the Cinnamon Bear, to which was annexed a well-patronized bar, and card-room.

The proprietor of this place was a ponderous specimen of humanity, Major Garibaldi Greer by name, whose boast was that he could tip the beam at three hundred pounds.

And when the Cinnamon Bear was built, a special width of doorway had been provided for the major, in order to admit his enormous corporeity.

The major was a bachelor, jolly as he was fat, and his hotel was known as the best along the range. One apoplectic German, Peter Schmidt, handled the managerial reins—for, once the major got seated at a card-table, it was too great an effort for him to arise for anything less than something unusually important.

When General Gleason reached the camp, he made his way direct to the office of the tavern, where he found Schmidt presiding.

"Good afternoon, Peter!" he saluted. "How do you find yourself?"

"Proke—deadt proke," Peter answered, dolefully, his face, as usual, getting as red as a blood beet. "I vas blay ein time mit der game off poker, und he skinned me oud."

"Ha! ha! Who did you play with?"

"Dot vone-eyed son-of-a-gun, vot haff no more ash vone leg, vot you pring here from der Red river."

"Indeed! So the colonel skinned you, with one eye, eh? Well, I hope better luck for you, the next time. Where is the major?"

"In the saloon."

Without tarrying, the general entered the bar and gaming saloon, which was spacious, and handsome—for the major would have no half-way things done about his place.

The major and Colonel McIntosh were seated at a table, engaged in a game of poker, which ended an instant after Gleason's entrance, and the fat man's full-moon face became radiant with satisfaction as he raked in a large sum of money.

McIntosh's jaw fell somewhat as he saw the general appear and the money disappear.

"Why, how are you, general?" Greer saluted, extending his fat hand. "If I wasn't so ponderous, I'd have the courtesy to rise. Just been learning our Southern senator, how uncertain is the life—of poker. How is the general?"

"I am quite hearty, thank you. I need not ask after your health, I suppose?"

"Not at all. Appearances are not deceitful in my case. Sit down, and lose a hundred with us?"

"Oh, no! You veterans would make quick work out of me. We will have a drop of the best, and then I'd like a private word with you."

To please the cattle-king, the major could afford to get out of his chair, and the trio adjourned to the bar, where the general threw down a gold-piece, and called up the drinks for the house.

After the drinks, the major and Gleason stepped to one side, out of earshot.

"I came here to learn what I could about this young Quick-Shot, who rescued my daughter," the general said, his eyes gleaming. "Knowing you to be on the square, I thought you would be as likely to tell what you know of him, as any one else."

"Certainly, general—certainly."

"Well, have you seen this fellow who calls himself Quick-Shot?"

"I have."

"What sort of a looking fellow is he?"

"Handsome."

"Such as a susceptible young lady of education and refined tastes would be apt to fancy?"

"Well, I dunno, general. I know'd a nabob lady ter marry a half-breed once."

"Where is this fellow?"

"He went off for a ride awhile ago; be back for supper, he said."

"Oh, I'll wait for him, then. They say he's a quick shot?"

"Such is the case, I hear. I should judge, from what experience I've had at interpreting their peculiarities o' human character, general, the' he'd be a purty safe character to let alone, speakin' rampageously."

"Has he brayado?"

"No; he ain't no blusterin' tough, but has every appearance of bein' a quiet gentleman. Ef ary pilgrim were to tweak his nose, however, I opine thar'd be another earthquake needin' to open up, ter swaller ther corpses. Not going to fight him?"

"Oh, no! I merely want to see him on business. I'll wait."

And the general sauntered away and took a seat on the veranda in front of the hotel.

He had to wait but half an hour, when a horseman came galloping leisurely down the trail and soon drew rein before the door, where he slid lightly to the ground and gave his handsome steed to the stable-hand.

He was a man of medium stature, with a wiry, muscular form, which, in its evident strength and suppleness, spoke of active life and exercise, both on foot and horseback.

His age apparently was between twenty-three and twenty-five years; his face was frank, open and handsome, with a firm but pleasant mouth, partly shaded by a brown mustache; deep brown eyes of sparkling expression, and hair of like shade, as wavy as the billows of the ocean and worn long over his shoulders.

Beginning at his feet, he wore a fine pair of top-boots, light woolen pants, a belt containing a pair of revolvers, a white flannel shirt open at the throat, and a finely-tanned buckskin jacket of scarlet color and most elaborate finish in the way of embroidery and golden bead-work.

A jaunty white prairie hat was worn upon his head, and he looked indeed a prince of the plains.

He ran lightly up the steps after dismounting, but paused after reaching the veranda on seeing the general arise as if to speak.

"Are you Mr. Quick-Shot?" Gleason demanded in a by-no-means pleasant tone.

"That's the title I bear, sir, among those who know me," the scout answered, bowing.

"You are the party, then, who, 'tis said, rescued my daughter?"

"I rescued a Miss Gleason, sir."

"Why did you not come to me, then, and claim the offered reward, sir, like a man?"

"Excuse me, but I hardly understand you. I had no desire to accept a reward for a mere act of common kindness."

"Oh, no—of course not. I understand your motive. You wish to ingratiate yourself into good society. You took that way of doing it, expecting to be received with open arms. You have even planned and maneuvered so well as to secure clandestine meetings with my daughter. Sir—rh! you are a low mongrel of a prairie cur—a dastard and a sneak."

"General Gleason!" Quick-Shot cried, drawing himself up proudly, his face flushed at the insult—"General Gleason, of Villa Voselle—let there be no mistake as to whom I mean—you are a liar and a coward!"

CHAPTER II.

THE DUEL AND THE WARNING.

THERE were several bystanders upon the veranda at the moment of the sudden outbreak, and had a bomb exploded in their midst it would have produced no more consternation than did the angry words of the two men.

In a town, even as quiet as was Daggersville, no greater insult was believed possible than to call a man a liar and coward, and yet this very thing had Quick-Shot done, and stood facing the cattle-king with stern face and flashing eyes.

General Gleason was truly staggered at the words hurled back by the Scarlet Scout. It was the first time he had been called a liar or coward to his face in many a long year.

"What is this, sir?" he gasped. "You call me a liar to my face?"

"I do, and repeat it. I never call a man any pet names behind his back. That is emphatically against my rules. You called me a dastard and a sneak, and I say you are a liar. I am a gentleman."

"I've a mind to strike you down where you stand, sir. I'll have you know that I'm not the man to be insulted by a common groveling. Take back your words, sir, or you shall rue it dearly."

"I am not the man, sir, to take back a word I utter until it is proven I am in the wrong. When I find I am in the wrong, sir, I am always willing to make proper retraction."

"See here, what's the trouble?" Major Greer demanded, waddling from within doors. "I, maybe, can make peace between you two gents. What's up?"

"This aristocrat, who imagines, because he is reputed to be rich, that he can insult people at will, called me a mongrel cur, a dastard, and a sneak, and I called him a liar and a coward. Now he demands that I shall submit to his insolence and take back my assertion!" Quick-Shot cried, hotly.

"If you don't it will be a sorry job for you!" Gleason gritted.

"I'll take my chances on that!" was the firm reply. "You provoked this quarrel, and if you want to push it you'll find I'll not run from you because you are, perhaps, financially, a bigger man than I."

"What caused this unfortunate affair, general?" the major asked, anxiously; for, while it was profitable for him to in a measure court the cattle-king's favor, he also had an eye to keeping on good terms with the patrons of his establishment, Quick-Shot being a guest.

"The cause is this!" Gleason replied, with an effort to check his rage. "This highly-picturesque individual, whoever he may be, has taken unwarrantable liberty in pushing an acquaintance with my daughter, on the strength of the fact that he rescued her, a few days since. It has even gone so far that he has induced her to meet him clandestinely. The dastard took the sneak's way of making his advances, knowing full well that I would order him from my house did he come there!"

A considerable crowd had gathered, and looked on wonderingly. Quick-Shot listened with stony calmness, his face now grown white with deep passion, and his eyes burning with a wild light.

When the general had finished Greer turned inquiringly to the scout.

"Well, Quick-Shot, what have you to say?" the major asked.

"It is useless to say anything for the ears of that ill-bred hotspur!" was the answer, contemptuously. "The breach was opened by him, and the current of words has made the channel too wide to easily bridge. I have no more to say than that if the assumed gentleman wants to settle the matter it can be done without any further tongue-lashing!"

"Do you give that as a challenge?" the general demanded savagely.

"I do—decidedly."

"Then I accept it. We will settle our differences with swords, as Southern gentlemen do; not with pistols, as Western desperadoes do. Major, oblige me by sending your man to Villa Voselle for my two best swords. Direct him to Pedro, my valet!"

"Unless you need two for your personal use, you need send for but one!" Quick-Shot said, with perceptible sarcasm. "I believe I have a blade in my room," and he walked away with a smile so aggravating as to cause the general to stamp the floor in his rage and mortified pride.

The crowd had by this time swelled to the dimensions of about a hundred persons, and excitement was increasing momentarily. A real out-and-out duel had never occurred in the camp, although free fights were of frequent occurrence, and the major had donated a plot of ground for free cemetery purposes which did not lack for "planting seed."

The last words of the general, regarding gentlemen using swords and desperadoes pistols, did not seem to create a very favorable impression, for there was many an exchange of dark and inquiring glances among the bystanders.

The general and major went one side and had a long talk while the hostler was gone for the weapons; but none of the villagers knew what passed between them.

By the time the hostler had got back Quick-Shot made his appearance, bearing a long, thin blade, with mountings of gold and settings of pure diamonds.

The general's was but a very ordinary affair as compared with it.

Without parley, the two men took to the middle of the street, prepared for business.

"Who is to act as referee?" the general asked, grimly.

"None is necessary for my part!" Quick-Shot replied. "It's you kill me, or I'll kill you; so stand on your guard!"

The crowd waited and watched, breathlessly. The antagonists advanced, eye meeting eye, firmly; each face stern, each expression unyielding.

The comparison between the two men was striking. The old general was much taller and

broad, and heavier by a hundred pounds, than Quick-Shot, and as he seized his blade, with soldierly bearing, an audience would have made their bets in his favor, as he looked eminently able to cut down his adversary, with a blow.

But, though the cattle-king towered above him—the fact did not seem to diminish Quick-Shot's courage in the least. He handled his blade with the skill and science of a professional swordsman, and every thrust made by the general, was neatly met and parried.

By choosing his favorite among weapons, it was evident the general had calculated to make quick and easy work of his opponent, having apparent physical as well as scientific advantage, on his side. Hence, it was little wonder he grew more enraged, as the advance of the duel proved that he had met fully his match, in the wiry and active Scarlet Scout.

Thrust, feint, parry, lunge!

The steel blades clashed together, swiftly, making strange music, upon the evening air.

Neither man spoke, but from the impressions upon their faces, it was easy to tell that it was no child's play they were indulging in.

For full ten minutes the deadly blades flashed through the air, and the ring of steel resounded, and though the general at last began to show signs of fatigue, Quick Shot was evidently as fresh as at the start.

Full well noting that he was losing ground, the general uttered a vindictive oath, and made a master effort to run his adversary through; but Quick-Shot had been expecting that very thing, and with remarkable quickness made a powerful parry which hurled the sword from the cattle-king's grasp, and sent it spinning a dozen feet away.

With almost the same breath, the Scarlet Scout raised his sword again, and smote the general heavily upon the cheek with the flat of the blade, knocking him to the ground.

"Mercy!" he cried, raising himself upon his elbow. "Mercy, I beg of you, Sir Scarlet Scout!"

"You need not to ask for it!" Quick-Shot answered. "I have your life in my hands, but would not have the stain of the blood of such a man as you upon my sword. Arise, sir, and take a stranger's advice—be a little more considerate in the future."

Thoroughly chagrined, the general arose to his feet, and received his blade, from Major Greer.

"You have won, sir, and against odds," he said, his voice trembling with bitter passion, which he tried to hold in check; "hence, I accept my life, from you, as a gift. This need not make any difference in our antagonistic relations, however. We are total strangers to each other, and I would warn you to keep your distance, both from me and mine. You are no fit person to court the acquaintance of my daughter, and if you have any common-sense or judgment, you will be only too glad to get out of this section of the country, at once!"

"I cannot comply, sir; I have been known to back out of a field, for any one. For you I have only what respect you deserve. For your daughter I have a respectful admiration, and as long as I have the least reason to believe that she reciprocates the feeling, I shall not hesitate to pay her any gentlemanly attentions that are honorable and acceptable to her, regardless of what your feelings may be on the matter. It may be improper to make such a statement in public, but as I have the pleasure of knowing that I did not begin the quarrel, I trust I will be excused for making your daughter's affairs the gossip of the camp."

"Then, do I understand, sir, that you openly defy me?"

"So far as you would intrude on my liberties as a citizen, yes!" Quick-Shot replied, with emphasis, and turning, he strode into the hotel.

General Gleason and the major directly followed his example, and repaired to the bar-room, where they became seated, and drinks were ordered.

"General, this is a most unfortunate affair!" the major said. "The duel of a few minutes ago, will do neither of you any particular credit—especially you!"

"Why not me?" the Cattle King demanded, fiercely, his Southern blood boiling in an instant.

"Because, from the first, you made a consummate ass of yourself," the major declared, with a good-natured, bantering laugh.

"Sir?" Gleason cried. "Have a care how you speak. I have regarded you as a friend, heretofore."

"And rightly, too!"

"Then, why do you side with this cowardly prairie pup?"

"Do you really think, giving your conscience its own rein, that the Scarlet Scout is a coward, general?"

"Of course I do. He is a low-bred ruffian!"

"I don't see through the same spectacles you do, then. From all I have gleaned, you, general, have shown the most unmistakable signs of ill breeding of the two."

"Curse it if you are not getting insulting, too!" the general stormed.

"Not a bit of it. I'm telling you truth that most any other man in the camp would fear to tell you. I don't fear to tell you, though, and you know it."

"Maybe not; yet you hadn't better go beyond the length of your rope, or even you may find yourself mistaken."

"Oh! I'm not afraid of it."

"Well, let's not argue on that point. You know well enough that the fellow is no person to associate with my daughter, and I would be an idiot to allow such a thing to take place. He worsted me at sword-play, but, curse him, I'll make this part of the country too hot for him yet, or I'm mistaken!"

"Be careful how you war with him, general. He isn't a boy."

"Nor am I a doll. Money is a powerful agent, here, even if common-sense can't be beaten into a person."

"Perhaps. But, would you, General Gleason, a man of chivalry, use money as an agent to destroy a person, who not only did you an invaluable service, but also never harmed you, and spared your life, when he could as well have taken it?"

"Did I say so?"

"You hinted as much."

"Maybe so. At any rate, I'll break up this intimacy, or I'll know the reason why. No common border ruffian can ever link himself with the proud old Gleasons."

"So you think. But, don't be too sure, general. There is no law to prevent the marriage of two single adult persons, in this State."

"There is a law—that of force!"

"Force is not a safe tool, always."

"Bah! Nonsense! Since you have broached the subject—what can money not buy, here?"

"Me!" the major declared, with emphasis. "And when I speak for myself, I speak for several others, I fancy."

"Oh! Indeed! Then, you put your power in comparison with mine?"

"Were it to come to another rebellion, in our quiet little sphere, I fancy I might stand a small show."

"You are foolish. It is an open fact that I control this town, its inhabitants, and the country for miles around."

"Do you?"

"I do. I have but to call, and a small army awaits my orders!"

"So you think. Doubt, however, is open to everybody. You may count your wealth, sir—and feel proud of it, too—by the hundred thousands of dollars, but, even your money cannot buy the honest strong arm of many a sturdy Westerner."

"Oh, think so, if you choose. You, I am aware, are interested in the Ronald syndicate, but I can crush the whole of you under my feet."

"If you possessed such power, you would have taken advantage of it, long ago. As for your being so perfectly a monarch of all you survey, please read this. It came addressed to me, as the envelope will show."

He then handed the general an envelope, torn open at one end, from which the cattle-king slowly extracted a letter, written in a scrawling hand.

The following were the contents:

"OFFICE OF CAP. MELTON, Cattle-Thief.
Aug. —, 18—."

"TO GENERAL GIDEON GLEASON:—"

"Sir:—I write you this little note to let you know that I have heard of the capture of two of my men, whom I sent to capture your daughter, whom it was my intention to hold, subject to ransom. I am also informed from private sources, that you have offered a reward of one thousand dollars for the capture of myself and followers, which, with that offered by the State, counties, and private parties, through your political influence, makes a round sum of 5 thousand."

"In writing you, I wish to express the heartfelt thanks of myself and my Rowdy Rangers, for your interest in our welfare; and wish, furthermore, to assure you that we shall improve the first safe opportunity to visit destruction on Villa Voselle, and all that appertains thereto."

"Yours to the death,

"CAP. MELTON,

"Chief of the Colorado Cattle Confiscators,
Limited."

CHAPTER III.

GRIT.

AFTER entering the hotel, the Scarlet Scout made his way directly to his room, and took a good bath, and rub-down.

Then, feeling greatly refreshed, he sallied forth upon the street once more. He was anxious to learn how the tide of public sentiment was drifting, for he was sanguine that his trouble with the cattle-king would make him enemies as well as friends. He was a stranger in the town of Daggersville, and realized that a moneyed power as an agent against a stranger, was an enemy not to be wholly despised.

That General Gleason would work to drive him from the town, he had not a doubt, no matter what cost it might entail. The man was arrogant and sternly set in his way, and he was plainly not a person to yield a point, when there was a ghost of a chance for him to win; hence, Little Quick-Shot needed no more to tell him that he was treading upon uncertain ground, and that it behooved him to keep wide awake to his own interests, as long as he remained in Daggersville.

Several respectable Americans were reported to have met their death in the camp, in an unaccountable manner; and what little investigation had been made, elicited no explanation of their fate.

'Twas said by the credulous that an Invisible Avenger haunted the town—a red-handed assassin, as it were, who possessed a ghostly face as white and sepulchral as that of a real corpse, and yet who possessed no body or underpinning whatever, as far as had ever been discovered.

The Dead Face was wont to peer in at shanty windows, of lonely nights, or be seen protruding from clumps of bushes, or over the tops of bowlders; but all attempts to capture the owner had thus far proved unavailing.

One peculiar circumstance connected with this specter, or whatever it was, was that, as an invariable rule, after it had been seen in and about the camp, a dead man was soon after discovered, with a bullet-hole through his heart, and his head turned to the north.

Thus it was that prairie and mountain-men grew into the opinion that Daggersville was uncanny and dangerous, wherefore it behooved a new-comer to "keep his eye peeled" when on a visit to the camp.

As Quick-Shot sauntered along the rugged street he was a target for many curious glances, and it was partly to get from under the fire of eyes that he stepped into a newly-built store or shanty, in front of which was a sign:

"GRIT GLEASON,

TOBACCO AND CIGARS."

He took no time to recollect that there was a resemblance in the name of the cigar-dealer and the cattle-king just then; but he thought of it afterward.

On entering the store, he found it to be a little pigeon-hole of a place, with a counter and show-case, and shelving, the latter two receptacles containing the rather limited stock of tobacco, cigars and smoker's articles.

Behind the counter presided a young woman, or more properly a girl, for her age could not have been over eighteen, if, indeed, she was that.

She possessed a *petite* but well-rounded figure, which was plainly attired in a neat gingham dress. She owned one of the prettiest faces Quick-Shot had seen in a long time. It was youthful, small, fine-featured, and merry. The mouth was of tempting, roguish, sweet expression, and the black eyes were like dancing diamonds in their brilliancy.

Her hair, like her eyes in color, was tossed back from her forehead in great abundance and charming confusion.

Her hands were small and white.

If Quick-Shot stared at her, it was no more than she did at him, for few men of his striking appearance ever visited Daggersville.

"A cigar, if you please," he said, throwing a coin down on the show-case—"one of the best you have."

"These Havanas are very good, I believe, for half a dollar each. I only bought a few of them, as I seldom have call for a high-priced cigar."

"I dare say not. The pipe, I believe, generally suits the average miner better. These are right good—I'll take half a dozen, please."

This liberal purchase appeared to fill the pretty store-keeper with delight, and she took extra pains to put the cigars up in a neat package.

"This is nice weather we are having, sir,"

she remarked. "I do like pleasant weather, even if it is warm."

"Yes. It will not be long before the rainy season sets in. You are newly started in your business here, are you not?"

"Oh! yes, sir—but a few days. I was suddenly thrown upon my own resources, and having nothing to do, Mr. Tabor thought I might make a nice little living at this business. I haven't sold myself rich yet, however."

And she laughed merrily.

"Riches do not always come in a day," Quick-Shot said, philosophically.

"To be sure they don't. A few good customers like you and Mr. Tabor, however, would make me believe I was getting rich."

"Your appearance would indicate that you have known better times."

"You bet we have, sir! You see, we came from the East a few years ago, and papa bought a big ranch and started into the stock-raising business. We were making out nicely, so far as I knew—there was only papa and I—except that papa drank pretty hard, until about a month ago—then came the crash."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. You see, papa came home one night, and said he was not feeling well, and believed he was coming down with the small-pox, to which he had been exposed over a week before up in the mountains at an Indian camp. I was awful scared, so I locked papa in the cabin we lived in, and mounting my pony, rode over to General Gleason's—he's my uncle—and told him about it. He had me seized and taken to one of his prairie cabins, and shut up there for ten days to see if I was going to come down with the small-pox."

"The brute!"

"I didn't like it, of course, but couldn't help myself. At the end of ten days an Indian doctor visited me, and on finding me all right, released me and took me back to uncle's. Oh! sir, then came the terrible blow."

"What was it? I have become very much interested!" Quick-Shot said.

"Oh! sir, they told me my father had been dead and buried a week. For fear the disease would spread, our humble cabin and all our effects had been burned, and papa had been buried where no one would be likely to find his grave. Not even me would they tell where he was buried."

"I dare say they could be forced to tell!" Quick-Shot suggested. "There could be no possible harm in your knowing your father's last resting-place."

"Certainly not. This has not been all my trouble, sir. Since I have told you so much, you may as well know all. When I asked concerning my father's ranch my uncle stated that everything belonged to him—that he held a mortgage on the ranch for double its value, and had foreclosed it; that he held judgment notes against the stock and other personal property, and had confiscated it, according to law. He said I was left upon the world penniless, but being young and strong, could undoubtedly take care of myself. He then advised me to leave this part of the country, and suggested that my position in life now would make it imperative that my acquaintance with the Gleasons of Villa Voselle should abruptly terminate; also that it would be prudent for me to change my name, did I remain in these parts, so that there could be no danger of my being regarded as one of his family."

"I presume you agreed to the suggestion!" the young inquisitor said, with a dry laugh.

"I presume I did not!" Miss Gleason responded. "I told him to go to blazes, and left the house. Lenore gave me fifty dollars out of her own pocket, and that helped me to start this place. I believe you are acquainted with Lenore! She is such a nice girl."

"I have met her several times since I rescued her. It was owing to this fact that the general precipitated the street quarrel awhile ago, with me."

"So I learned. You rather worsted him."

"I placed him at my mercy, and gave him his life. I presume he will try to take mine as a return compliment."

"I should not be surprised if he did. Although he is a relative of mine, I am sorry to say I believe him capable of almost any mean action."

"Your opinion coincides with my own. From what I have seen of the general, I must say he has a rascally and selfish disposition. It would not surprise me to learn that you have been deliberately swindled out of your father's estate by your uncle."

"Oh, sir! do you really think so?"

"I do, for a certain ty."
 "That is what Mr. Tabor believes, too."
 "Indeed? Who is this Mr. Tabor?"
 "A gentleman who heard of my distress and kindly assisted me."
 "Is he a resident of Daggersville?"
 "Oh! no sir. He is a gentleman of leisure, who comes and goes at will, spending much of his time at hunting and prospecting. I like him very much, for he took pity on me when the world turned a cold shoulder."
 "I trust he did so, young lady, with good and honorable intentions. An unprotected young lady, nowadays, cannot be too careful from whom she accepts attentions, for many a wolf is lurking under sheep's clothing."
 "I am very much obliged for your kind advice, but, don't fear but what Grit Gleason can take care of herself."
 "Hav'n't a doubt of it. I must be going now, as I have a ride to take."
 "You are not going to the Cottonwoods?"
 "How did you guess it?"
 "Because Lenore has gone there. Be careful, sir! General Gleason is not to be trusted too far, and there are plenty of tools in this camp whom he could hire to work you evil."
 "You are right. I shall be on my guard, however, and will defy the general and the whole kit of his hired assassins. I shall see Lenore, to night, just the same as though nothing had occurred."
 "Well, call again, when you want another stock of good cigars."
 "I will do so," and Quick-Shot took his leave.

General Gleason's face wore an anxious expression, as he read the letter of Cap. Melton. This Melton was one of the most cunning and dangerous desperadoes, in Southern Colorado, and had rallied around him a band of cut-throats, second only to himself, known as the Rowdy Rangers, and also as the Cattle Clique. No crime was said to be too horrible for them to commit, and their frequent raids into New Mexico seemed to prove this, for they ever left behind them a trail of murder, arson and pillage.

The band was extensive and well organized, and Melton made them a successful leader, being feared, 'twas said, as much by his own followers, as by those whom he waged war against. Report had it that he had once graduated from West Point; at any rate, scouts and others who were in a position to know, claimed that his band were drilled as well as soldiers, and could fight like tigers.

Again, it was rumored that private citizens in different parts of various adjoining States, were in collusion with Melton, and had a lively interest in the successes of the Cattle Clique.

A very Apollo among men, in point of manly beauty, this Melton was said to be, and a man of many disguises, many intrigues, and great wealth.

It was well known that he and General Gleason were bitter enemies; but the cause of this was assigned to the fact that it was through the cattle-king's extensive and powerful political influence, that large rewards had been offered for the capture or breaking up of the gang. If any private reasons for the enmity existed, it was not known to the Daggersvillians.

The major watched the general's face, as he read the letter, something like a triumphant expression upon his own countenance.

"Well, what d'ye think of it?" he asked finally. "Looks as if every person for miles around, wasn't on your side, does it not?"

"Curse the fellow! He is bold, I'll admit, but he has run pretty nearly to the end of his race. It won't be long, before he will be in limbo."

"Possibly. But he may give you a dig before he passes in his checks. You bring him to bay, and he'll spare nothing in his efforts to defeat you."

"Well, let him do his worst; I'll be prepared for him!"

The general then arose, and left the Cinnamon Bear, his face set and stern and a wicked glitter in his eyes.

Not far from the Cinnamon Bear, was a saloon, frequented by the "bad" men of Daggersville. It was run by a brawny ruffian, named Buck Brady, a leading spirit among his patrons, and feared as a desperate character, who would rather shoot than eat.

Brady and half a dozen of his customers, were drinking at the bar, as the general entered, and gave him a surprised stare, for the Slop-Bucket, as Brady's place was christened, rarely had so distinguished a visitor as the general.

"Howdy do, Gleason!" Brady cried, familiarly. "Join us in a 'coffin-nail'?"
 "I don't mind if I do!" the general replied, with assumed cheerfulness. "Then, I want a word with you, in private."

A round of drinks were disposed of, and then Brady and the cattle-king entered a back room, where the ruffian usually slept.

"Now, sail in, general!" he ordered. "I know thar's sumthin' o' importance on the tap, or ye wouldn't condescend to honor my den wi' a visit."

"There is something important, Brady—something of the utmost importance to me. I want a job done, and didn't know of a safer intelligence agency than yours."

"Right ye be. Buck Brady air the ha'rp in to apply to, when ye want a job done, an' don't ye fergit that! What sorter job d'ye want done, general—a man put out of the way?"

"You have hit it."
 "Thet air Scarlet Scout?"
 "The very man."

"Thort so. I reckoned you'd want revenge, ye know, arter he humiliated ye at yer own game. Bin layin' fer yer gal, eh?"

"He has dared to intrude into her society. He is a man I don't care to have about, and so the best way to do is to get rid of him before he does any greater mischief."

"Exactly. When d'ye want it did?"

"To-night. I believe the fellow will lurk about the Cottonwoods, to-night, on purpose to get an interview with my daughter. Your authority as deputy-sheriff will empower you to shoot him down at sight, if you catch him prowling about the premises. However, do not shoot him, if you can arrest him on any charge that would bear a trial, for I'd much rather ruin him than have his life to answer for."

"All right. Just as you say, it shall be, and don't you forget it. The job will cost you a hundred-dollar-William."

"Cheap enough. Here's your money. Now, understand, make no botch of it."

"Nary time, general, nary time. We'll fix the Scarlet Scout, to-night, sure."

CHAPTER IV.

WHO KILLED RALPH RONALD?

NEXT to Villa Voselle, the Cottonwoods was the most valuable estate anywhere within many miles of Daggersville. It was owned by the wide-awake business man, Mr. Ronald, better known as Old Man Ronald—a crisp, curt and yet not unkindly Englishman, who had made and lost several fortunes, yet could boast of a thousand acres of prairie, stocked with as many cattle, and a controlling interest in the two principal quartz mines at Daggersville.

The Cottonwoods was a large, rambling structure of mixed stone and adobe, early Spanish in style and antique in finish, and fitted up with splendor that surpassed even the furnishings of Villa Voselle.

It was set down in a beautiful motte of cottonwoods, and the whole surrounded by a high adobe wall, that gave the place the appearance of a fortress.

It had once been the property of a rich Mexican, who had failed, and had been forced to sell it to Old Man Ronald.

The grounds were laid out quite as picturesquely as those at Villa Voselle, and it had for years been a matter of rivalry, between the general and the Old Man, as to which should have the most attractive home.

Of the Ronalds there were four—father, mother, son and daughter.

Ralph Ronald, the son, had been kept at school, from almost infancy, and had recently graduated at Harvard, with the highest honors.

It was in honor of his return that a reception had been planned at the Cottonwoods, to welcome him, after an absence of three years.

Ruth Ronald, aged seventeen—where Ralph was twenty-four—had graduated, a year before our story. She was a plain little body of quiet ways, and yet sparkling, intelligent and pretty.

She and Lenore Gleason were the firmest of friends; and until Colonel McIntosh had been imported from the South, it had been a matter of quiet supposition between the two families, that Lenore and Ralph would eventually marry, and link the two estates together.

It was a dark tempestuous night, that was to witness Ralph Ronald's return home; nevertheless, the Cottonwoods was literally a blaze of light. Not only the handsome dwelling, but even the shaded grounds were lit up, and within the mansion the inspiring strains of music lent

joy to the occasion. The grand parlors were filled with richly attired guests, and with those of rougher exterior, but of kindly natures. Old Man Ronald always made it a boast, that the poor were just as welcome to his home as were the rich; consequently, he counted his friends by scores upon scores.

And although the Cottonwoods was filled with guests, and the tables loaded with the elements of a princely feast, there was something lacking.

Ralph Ronald had not come!

He should have arrived at sunset, as he had written that he would leave the nearest railway station, that morning, on horseback, and surely reach the Cottonwoods by dusk, at the furthest.

But, dusk had come; darkness had followed; yet no Ralph Ronald.

It was already nine o'clock. Old Man Ronald, a fat, florid little gentleman, paced to and fro, with knitted brows, speaking to no one, except to occasionally send some one to learn if Ralph had arrived; and anxiety was expressed upon the faces of all present.

Lenore and Ruth kept closely in each other's company, and the general and the ill looking colonel chatted soberly together, upon a sofa, in a retired corner.

What could detain Ralph?

This was the question on every side!

Had he been waylaid, on the prairie, and murdered or captured? Or, had some unforeseen accident prevented his arriving at the railway station, at the time named?

The question was answered, an hour later, when Mr. Ronald was contemplating dismissing his guests. Heavy footsteps were heard in the hall, and a moment later Little Quick-Shot entered the parlor, bearing in his strong arms the limp, bleeding form of a well-dressed young man of about his own age, and laid him upon the floor.

A horrified cry went up from every side, and Old Man Ronald sprang forward, with a moan of anguish.

"My God! it is my boy!" he cried. "He is dead. Oh! my boy! my boy!"

"Stand back, please!" Quick-Shot ordered, addressing the guests who crowded about. "Give the young gentleman air. I think he is alive yet."

He knelt and made an examination of the wound, which had been inflicted upon the forehead, by some sharp-edged instrument.

"The skull is not fractured!" he said, a moment later, "and I reckon he is only stunned, for his heart still beats. Fetch me some water, and a glass of liquor."

"My God! my poor son is dead, I fear," Mr. Ronald groaned. "Where did you find him, sir?"

"I was riding this way, sir, over the prairie, when my horse shied so suddenly, as to nearly pitch me from the saddle," Quick-Shot explained. "Knowing something must be wrong, I dismounted, made a search, and as a result, found this young man lying on the grass. Yours being the nearest habitation, I brought him here, without suspecting that he was your son."

"You have placed us under life-long obligations to you, sir," the mine-owner said. "If you can only bring him back to life, so that he can explain who did this act, I'll have the whole country aroused but what I'll find the wretch!"

"I reckon thet ain't necessary, boss!" a hoarse, triumphant voice cried, and Buck Brady strode into the room, followed by half a dozen of his pals, all of whom grasped cocked revolvers, ready for use. "Boys, cover your man!"

In a twinkling each weapon was leveled at Little Quick-Shot, who had turned pale with rage, on perceiving the turn that had been called upon him.

A murmur of surprise and doubt escaped the lips of the guests.

"What! Do you charge this young man with being the one who committed the assault upon my son?" Old Man Ronald demanded, sternly.

"You bet yer boots I do!" Brady declared. "Ef ye wanter know, I kin tell ye j-st how we know."

"Proceed, sir."

"Waal, ye see, we were directed ter keep a watch on this Scarlet Scout, as he were a suspicious keracter. So we follered him, and s-e-d him meet yer son, an' slug him wi' suthin' or other. Arter yer son fell, we heerd him say, 'Thar, you won't stand twixt me an' Lenore Gleason, Ralph Ronald. I'll tote ye hum, an' get a footing wi' yer parents fer doin' so.'"

Then he fetched yer son here, and we follered ter arrest him."

"This is an atrocious lie—a conspiracy to injure me!" Quick-Shot cried, fiercely. "I know nothing of how this young man was hurt. I found him, as I stated to you, and brought him here. This lying ruffian has been employed to do me this evil turn, and I am not afraid to name his employer. There he sits, like the villain he is, rejoicing at the apparently successful attempt he has made to ruin me—General Gideon Gleason!"

"You lie! you lie!" the cattle-king roared, leaping to his feet, in a rage.

"He don't lie!" cried a second voice, and into the room stepped Grit Gleason, the pretty shop-keeper. "There is a diabolical conspiracy here, and you, Gideon Gleason, are at the bottom of it! I saw you visit Buck Brady's den to-night, and knowing of your hatred for the Scarlet Scout, I suspected your motive. When Brady and his men left the town, I dogged their footsteps, and I am here to swear that they came direct to this place, and secreted themselves in the park, and remained there until they saw Quick-Shot entering this house with the man in his arms! You see what a lie has been told, in hopes of criminating the Scarlet Scout!"

"Seize that girl! She, too, is in league with the assassin!" General Gleason roared. "Justice shall be done here, though the heavens fall!"

A couple of Brady's pals rushed upon the brave girl, and secured her, in spite of her frantic struggles.

The house was now in dire confusion, and every one was greatly excited.

"Silence to this clatter!" Old Man Ronald ordered. "We'll have order in my house. There's something that needs investigation. If this scout is not the guilty man, a villainous attempt has undoubtedly been made to injure him. Be he criminal, or not, he shall have fair play. He shall remain my prisoner until some light can be thrown upon the matter."

"I jest reckon I've got a smell of a say 'bout that, boss!" Buck Brady cried. "I'm deputy-sheriff, ye know, an' I takes charge o' all offenders, every time! We cotched that Scarlet Scout a-committin' the act, an' that's all we need ter 'rest him."

"Villain! monster! you shall never take him from this house!" Lenore cried. "I will stand by him, if no one else will!"

And she swept across the room, and took her place beside Quick-Shot, looking like an angered queen, as she clutched a pistol in her hand.

"Lenore! girl! for God's sake, what are you about!" the general raved, frantic with rage, and yet afraid to attempt tearing her away from Quick-Shot's side.

"What am I doing?" Lenore retorted. "I'll tell you! I am standing here, ready to shoot down the dogs whom you set on to destroy my preserver."

"And I'm with you, Lenore!" Grit exclaimed. "There'll be a dead Brady here, if an attempt is made to harm the brave scout."

"Let me say a word here!" Major Greer interposed, stepping forward. "This man has been arrested by an officer of the law, and if Mr. Ronald desires to hold him, he must give bail, in the sum of ten thousand dollars."

"Which I stand ready to do—all bear witness. Further evidence is not necessary. Brady, release these two people. I'll be responsible for them!"

"I object to this!" General Gleason cried furiously.

"Your objection is overruled, sir. Everybody knows that Mr. Ronald's word as bail is good for many times the amount," the major replied. "But enough of this. The young man must be revived."

Willing hands procured water and liquor, and every effort was made to resuscitate the stricken son.

But all to no avail.

At half-past ten o'clock he was taken with convulsions and apparently expired within half an hour afterward.

There were but few dry eyes in the room as his life ebbed out, but among those who were unaffected might be named General Gleason and Brady and his gang.

Mr. Ronald's grief was silent.

He knelt a few minutes by the inanimate form of his son, then arose and turned to Quick-Shot, who was much affected.

"Sir, my boy is dead!" Ronald said, "and you are charged with his murder. Although I hardly believe in your guilt, I mean to thoroughly investigate the matter. The trial will take place to-morrow at ten, and until

then I have gone your bail. Will you do as much—appear and stand your trial like a man?"

"God permitting, I will."

"Then you are at liberty to go."

Quick-Shot bowed and turned to depart, but Lenore pulled him to one side and uttered a few words in a low tone.

They were:

"Sh! listen! Come for me at two to-night. Listen again and help me. I will bid you never enter my presence again; as a blind, you see!"

She then stepped back haughtily, her face as cold and white as marble.

"Sir!" she cried, angrily, "you mistake your position altogether. You have no right to talk thus to me! Begone, sir, and never dare to enter my presence again. I can never be aught to one like you. Go!"

"Lenore!" Quick-Shot said, entreatingly.

"Go!" she fairly screamed, stamping her foot passionately.

He bowed his head, and turning, quitted the parlor like one dealt a sudden blow.

His footsteps had scarce died out when Buck Brady uttered a frightful oath and pointed to one of the parlor windows.

"The Dead Face!" was his startling cry.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS.

NOTHING more startling than the cry of the border ruffian could have tended to electrify the already excited guests at the Cottonwoods, for the apparition of the Dead Face had been seen by nearly all of those present, and they knew it was an omen of evil.

The trembling finger of Buck Brady pointed toward the large pane of a bay window, against which the face was pressed.

It was a long, gaunt face belonging to a man of advanced years, the skin being drawn tightly over the bones, the lips sufficiently parted to expose to view two gleaming rows of teeth, the eyes tightly closed, and the whole beardless face wearing a ghastly whiteness, peculiar only to the face of a corpse.

The head was covered with bristly gray hair, which stood in all directions.

A more frightful spectacle to behold would be hard to conceive, and it was little wonder that exclamations of horror escaped the guests.

For only a few seconds was the dead face pressed against the pane—then, there was a wild shriek of laughter, and the apparition, or whatever it was, vanished.

"Quick! capture it, boys!" Buck Brady yelled, springing through an open window, upon the lawn.

"A hundred dollars to the man that does!" General Gleason cried.

But the search was in vain. Half an hour of it failed to discover the owner of the Dead Face, or any trace of him. Whoever the cadaverous gentleman was, he had taken good care, evidently, to put distance between himself and the Cottonwoods, ere Brady and his gang could act.

As soon as the result of the search was made known, Mr. Ronald dismissed the guests, with a pathetic little speech, and after tendering their sympathy and regrets, they departed for their respective homes.

"I am proud to see that you have come to your senses, Lenore," the general said, as, accompanied by Colonel McIntosh, he and his daughter galloped toward Villa Voselle. "I could never imagine how one of your refined tastes, could take a notion to a border ruffian like the fellow Quick Shot."

"I thought I fancied him, at first. But, papa, dear, don't you think he is better-looking than your scarecrow friend, the colonel?"

"Lenore! for shame! How dare you speak so insultingly of Mr. McIntosh. He is a gentleman—a man who can provide well for your happiness. The loss of an eye and a limb never depreciates the merits of the man, you know!"

"Of course not! of course not!" the colonel coughed. "Why, to tell the truth, Miss Gleason, I feel just as young, as I did when a boy."

"You look decidedly giddy!" Lenore replied, her eyes snapping. "That cherry-tinted nose of yours, will save us the expense of light, after we are married. Oh, but won't I bleed your pocketbook though! Worth shall keep a special envoy in this country, to supply me with costumes."

"You shall have your heart's every desire granted, dear Lenore!" the old suitor said, gallantly. "But, tell me, beautiful lady, when am I to be made happy? Business demands my

attention at home, and I would like to hasten matters, as much as possible."

"You better hasten right along home, then, as it will take me a month, at least to get ready."

"But, Lenore, you must be considerate, and try to oblige the colonel. You can be married right away, so as to make sure of the thing; then the colonel can return home, and you can rejoin him, later."

"Oh! well, I'll think about it till to-morrow. The tragic death of young Mr. Ronald has really unnerved me so much that I cannot consider anything, to-night."

"Then you shall have till to-morrow. If you do not come to a decision then, I fear I shall have to give up all hopes of winning you. I do not like to be toyed with!" the colonel said.

"Very well. You shall have my final decision, in the morning, sir!" Lenore replied, wearily.

The remainder of the journey was completed in silence. The general's mind was busily occupied in thought, and the others evidently had no desire to speak.

On reaching Villa Voselle, the colonel bade the general and Lenore good-night, and rode on toward Daggersville.

After entering the house, the general was about to seek his own apartments, when Lenore bade him enter the parlor.

She then turned on the light and confronted him:

"I want to understand one thing!" she said, her face white and cold in its expression. "What are you going to do toward helping clear Little Quick-Shot?"

"Toward helping clear him!" he ejaculated. "Why, you silly, I intend to spend money and time for the purpose for seeing him hung!"

"You do—and you claim to be a father of mine?"

"I do; and I believe I have ever been a father to you. That low-lived cur has insulted me beyond pardon, and I shall see that he gets the justice he deserves."

"He did not kill Ralph Ronald?"

"He did."

"It is false, and you know it! You trumped up that accusation to injure him. Promise me that you will clear him of that foul charge, or you are no longer a father of mine!"

"Bah! I'll promise nothing of the kind; and I'll learn you I'm your father, and master, too! Go to your room, and if I ever hear you speak of that puppy again, I'll break your neck!"

"Will you?" Lenore said, haughtily, and, turning, she swept out of the parlor.

She went to her room, which overlooked the lawn, and wrapped up a little bundle of clothing, together with her money and jewelry, and a few trinkets. She then took her seat at the open window, after dimming the light, and peered down upon the lawn.

The tempest had only fairly begun, evidently, for the wind blew with increased force, and the rain came down in fitful gusts. It was a wild night, and so dark that Lenore could barely distinguish the ground below.

An hour passed, then she heard a low whistle, and saw a form standing below her window.

"Is that you, Quick-Shot?" she asked in a low tone.

"It is I, and no one else! How are you coming down?"

"By the front way. Wait."

She cautiously dropped her bundle to him; then left her room, and glided down the carpeted stairway.

Pedro was snoring upon a sofa in the lower hall, it being his usual nocturnal post. To get past him, and unbolt the ponderous front-door, required great caution; but she finally succeeded in doing so, and in five minutes or less, was with the young Knight of the Pistol.

"Free at last!" she murmured. "I have left that home forever; and, as you asked me to be your wife, I now seek your love and protection."

"And, my angel, you shall have both to the fullest extent!" he said, taking her fondly in his embrace. "You have given up wealth, home and position, for a rough diamond; but God grant our path through life be so smooth that you will never have cause to regret this night's move!"

"Did I not have the fullest confidence in you, I should not be with you now, Don."

"I believe you. But come; it is dangerous for us to tarry here."

"Where are you going to take me?"

"To a shanty on the outskirts of Daggersville. I purchased it for a trifle from a disgusted miner to-day."

"But had we not better go far away?"
"It is impossible now. I must wait and stand my trial, at ten, to-morrow. I would not go away, for double the amount of bail, that has secured me my present liberty. No, we will go to this shanty, and I dare say will be safe there, for a day or so, as no one knows I purchased the place, the miner decamping immediately after he got his money."

"But, Don, are you not afraid to stand your trial? My father has sworn to work his best to convict you, and I fear that you will stand a poor show of justice."

"I do not. I've every confidence of my acquittal. Your cousin's statement alone breaks down that of Buck Brady, who is known to be an inveterate liar."

"Perhaps. I only hope so. Will the minister be waiting us?"

"Yes. He will be there."

They left the spacious grounds, and just without, found waiting Little Quick-Shot's handsome steed, which was mounted, and they went flying away toward Daggersville.

Avoiding the heart of the town, they passed through the outskirts, and into the gap, and in a short time, came to a clump of firs, in the gap, in among which was a snug board shanty.

Ten out of a dozen passers of the locality, probably, would not have noticed the structure, unless something directed their attention particularly to the clump of trees.

After Quick-Shot had lariatied out his horse, he and Lenore entered the dwelling, which consisted of one fair-sized room, and a smaller sleeping apartment.

A cheery fire was burning, a candle furnished the light, and two persons were seated upon stools, which, with a table and rude lounge, comprised the furniture.

One of the persons was Miss Grit Gleason, and the other, the only clergyman of Daggersville, where he plied the pick instead of practicing his profession.

After Lenore had removed her outer wraps, the twain took their places before the minister, who soon had the nuptial knot lawfully tied, and pronounced them man and wife.

After extending their heartiest congratulations, Grit and the minister departed for Daggersville, the former promising to keep a watch for the newly-married couple, and inform them, should any danger threaten them.

CHAPTER VI.

GLEASON'S UNWELCOME VISITANT.

EARLY the next morning, Pedro, who was a devoted servant to his master, walked into his master's presence, as he sat in his library, and handed him a letter.

"I don't know what it is, sir, but I found it on the stand in Lenore's room, and she is not there!"

"Ten thousand devils seize the girl! I believe she has outwitted me, at last. Read, Pedro—quick!"

Pedro tore away the envelope, and obeyed with alacrity.

The contents were short, and to the point:

"FATHER:—When this reaches you, I shall be away from here, and the wife of Donald Waverly, better known as Little Quick-Shot. It will be useless for you to hunt for us, as we shall be out of your reach, never to return, until you welcome us as a son and daughter."
"LENORE."

Pedro paused.

Gideon Gleason was staring at the floor, a savage expression upon his face.

"Balked!" he said, at last, without raising his eyes. "All is now lost!"

"So am I balked; but all is not lost!" a triumphant voice exclaimed, and, wheeling about, Pedro and the General found a pair of revolvers leveled at them from the grasp of a tall, Apollo-like knight of the plains.

A man, he was of commanding aspect, an eagle eye, and a handsome face; it was evident he would make a formidable antagonist in a personal encounter.

General Gleason's face grew somewhat whiter at sight of this man, whom he knew but too well.

"Cap. Melton!" he gasped. "You dare to come here?"

"To be sure!" the other answered, with a sententious sort of laugh. "I dare to go anywhere, you know—that's why I am so amazingly free and easy in my movements. Business in my line being rather dull, I thought I'd ride over for my intended bride, the fair Lenore. It

seems, however, by the letter your servant has just read, that she has given us both the shake!"

"It matters not. You couldn't have her, were she here!" the general cried, noting with chagrin that the cattle-catcher's weapons never wavered from their aim.

"I doubt that. I shouldn't have stood on any ceremony about inviting her to accompany me. As it is now, I'll give you till to-night, midnight, to hand her over to me, as my lawful property. If you fail, I'll do you harm. I've got my plans all arranged, and I mean to push them to the bitter end, you bet! Deliver the girl to me, and I withdraw all hostilities!"

"Bah! what care I for your hostilities? Not so much, I'll swear, that I could for a moment think of yielding up my beautiful daughter as prey to one of your stamp!"

"Then you defy me, do you?"

"To the bitter end!"

"Very well. You have till midnight to accept my terms; after that I wouldn't like to stand in the shoes of the owner of Villa Voselle. Good-morning!"

And, uttering a mocking laugh, the handsome chief of the Cattle Clique backed out of the room and was gone.

Gleason made no motion to institute a pursuit, but sat for several moments in deep thought; then he arose and sought his own room.

Here he remained for awhile, when he ordered his horse, and mounting, rode away toward Daggersville.

On arrival there he found that a large crowd had collected in front of the Cinnamon Bear Hotel to witness the trial of Little Quick-Shot.

As the town afforded no suitable place for a public trial, a temporary platform had been erected in the street for the accommodation of those taking an active part in the proceedings.

Upon it were already seated Old Man Ronald and his daughter Ruth, several of the male guests of the previous night, Major Greer, Buck Brady, his five pals, and a couple of townsmen.

Little Quick-Shot and Grit Gleason were neither of them present.

There was a scowl upon the general's face as he rode up to the platform and drew rein.

"Are you gentlemen waiting here to try the ruffian, Quick-Shot?" he demanded, grimly.

"We are waiting to try Quick-Shot," the major declared, blandly.

"Then you are spending time uselessly." Gleason announced, a spice of triumph in his tones. "for my daughter, I am ashamed to say, has eloped with the rascal, and they've had at least nine hours' time, I calculate, to get out of town. Old Man Ronald consequently forfeits ten thousand dollars, which goes to the real estate owners of the town!"

"Oh no! It goes into the treasury, and officers will have to be appointed to receive it for town expenses—that is, if I lose it, for it lacks twenty minutes of ten o'clock yet, and I have every confidence Little Quick Shot will be here!" Ronald declared.

"We will see. You needn't hope to creep out of the bail. If you do, I'll spend twice the amount, but what you shall pay it!"

"I'm not noted for making an ass out of myself!" Mr. Ronald retorted hotly.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I have?" the general roared, growing apoplectic.

"You have, sir, I'll agree, and so will every one else."

"You are a liar and a puppy! I'll see you as soon as you are done, here!"

"Very well, sir, you shall be accommodated!"

The crowd was electrified.

Here were two men of great power, literally at war; what would be the result?

There could be but one. They would fight it out to the bitter end, for, although they had never had angry words before, it was known that they were not particularly fond of each other, politically or socially, and should a rupture occur, neither would give up, until the other was dead or out of the country.

The fuse had now been kindled; the explosion was to follow.

Either man, if it came to an open fight, could muster a formidable force of the "tigers" of mountain, mines and prairie, and it looked as if a bloody strife might now reasonably be expected.

The spectators and listeners conversed in low tones, but neither of the cattle-kings spoke again soon.

Grit Gleason now made her appearance upon the platform, looking as bright and cheery as a rose. Somehow, she was a favorite in Daggersville, because she was good-natured, shrewd and capable of taking good care of herself.

"Have you seen Quick-Shot, Miss Gleason?" Major Greer asked, making room for her beside his corpulent person.

"Not this morning, sir."

"The general tells us he has eloped with his daughter, and will not appear."

"That is both true and false. He and Lenore Gleason did elope, but Quick-Shot will be here. He is not the man to run from an enemy."

A faint cheer went up from the crowd, but General Gleason uttered an oath.

"So you were a party to the plot, were you?" he cried, in a fury.

"No, but you bet I took in the weddin' tho'. Hello! yonder comes Quick-Shot, now!"

General Gleason made a move toward an inner pocket, with his hand, but at the same time saw the major cover him, with a revolver.

"Let up!" the fat man cried. "I'm watching you, so don't come none of that sort of business, or you'll be sorry for it!"

At that instant Little Quick-Shot galloped up to the stand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIDER'S MESSAGE.

A FAINT cheer broke from the lips of the crowd, as the Scarlet Scout rode up, looking as handsome and manly as before the cloud of guilt hovered over him.

Quick-Shot nodded pleasantly—then leaped from his saddle to the platform, and stood with folded arms, awaiting proceedings—not a tremor of fear upon his face.

"You can take a seat!" the major said. "I have undertaken the responsibility of your defense, sir, while Mr. Renfrew, one of our townsmen, will act for the people. Mr. Lavery has been appointed judge. Now, then, we will get to work. Buck Brady is the first witness for the prosecution."

Brady arose and was sworn.

His testimony can be summed up as follows:

"Your honor, all I know of the case is this. General Gleason come to me an' said as how he regarded this chap, Quick-Shot, as a 'spicious character, and advised that it war my duty ter watch him. I see'd him leave town about dusk, an' calculatin' he were up to some mischief, me an' five o' ther boys follered him. We come up ter him jest in time ter see him steal up behind the young feller, an' whack him over the head. One blow did the job, an' the young man tumbled out o' the saddle. The prisoner then bent over him, and sed, aloud: 'Ha! ha! You won't stand between me and Lenore Gleason, Ralph Ronald. I'll tote ye home, and get a footin' wi' yer parents fer doin' so.' He then shouldered the body, an' fetched it to the Cottonwoods. We follered, an' I guv him away, as yer know. That's all I know or keer. It war a plain out an' out murder, an' the scarlet coat orter stretch hemp!"

Brady told this with apparent perfect candor, but his testimony did not seem to impress the crowd. Their sympathies were evidently with the Scarlet Scout.

One by one Brady's pals were sworn, and their testimony taken. It corresponded with that of the greater ruffian in all respects.

As no further evidence of importance was to be had on the part of the prosecution, the defense was taken up, by putting Grit Gleason upon the stand.

Her statement was clear and concise:

"All I know of the case is this," she said.

"Donald Waverly, alias Little Quick-Shot, is a Government detective. I should not know this only by the accidental discovery of his badge, while he was purchasing cigars at my store. Many of you witnessed a duel between the young gentleman and Gideon Gleason, and understood that it was because Donald had paid lovely attentions to Lenore Gleason. Well, it was after this I first met the prisoner, and learned that he was a detective. I warned him to look out, as the general would try to harm or ruin him. It was after the duel that I saw the general visit Buck Brady's den. I felt sure he would not go to that vile hole except for some evil purpose, for, as you all well know, Brady has a hard reputation, and more than one sad crime has been traced to his door. Money, however, has always saved his neck from the halter; but let us hope that some day money will fail to shield him."

Brady's face grew livid with rage, but he did not speak.

"Believing the general was plotting Little Quick-Shot some dire harm, and knowing that the latter was to meet Lenore at the Cottonwoods, I kept watch. Half an hour before dusk, Donald rode away from the town. Just at dusk, Buck Brady and his five cut-throat pals

set out on foot for the Cottonwoods. Then I knew for certain that they were bent on some devil's work, and suspecting that Donald was to be harmed, I dogged their footsteps. They got into the Ronald grounds, by scaling the wall on the northern side, and secreted themselves in an old unused arbor. I was close at hand. They watched the mansion, and when Quick-Shot entered it, bearing Ralph Ronald in his arms, I distinctly heard Buck Brady say, with an oath, 'Boys, there's our chance,' and they rushed into the house. I followed in time to hear Brady's base, lying charge, and I pronounced it an utter falsehood, as I do now! I say he is a liar, and in this matter is doing some other villain's work."

"Is there any other testimony to offer?" Judge Laverty asked, drumming on his hastily improvised desk.

"There is," Major Greer answered, arising. "It looks to me as though there was a scheme afoot to ruin the prisoner. I had a talk with the general, yesterday, and he swore he'd spend a fortune to drive Quick-Shot from the country, or see him hung."

"That is a lie!" General Gleason roared. "I never said anything of the kind."

"Can you prove your assertion, major?" the judge asked.

"Unfortunately no. We were alone, when the general uttered the threat."

"It cannot be accepted as evidence, then. Mr. Ronald, do you know of any reason whatever why Donald Waverly should murder your son?"

"No, sir, I do not. I never saw the young man before, and am positive my son had not, as when not away at college he was always closely at home."

"Yet it is not impossible that he did do it. As I view it, the evidence is strongly against him. Here are five men, who have solemnly sworn that they saw the crime committed. The defense bears but one witness, and she a young woman of a susceptible age. Women are tender-hearted, and, naturally, to save a man's life, would do many things they could not do, under other circumstances—or at least, would not do!"

"Do you mean to say I lie?" Grit cried, with blazing eyes. "Why, I'll—I'll—"

"Silence!" the major commanded. "Proceed, judge."

"I have little to add," the judge resumed. "As no jury has been impaneled, I believe I am expected to act to the best of my judgment, in rendering a just and conscientious verdict. It therefore remains for me to say, that I find the prisoner at the bar—"

"Stop!" Mr. Ronald cried, jumping up. "Here comes one of my herders, on horseback, at breakneck speed. Perhaps he brings news!"

"Go ahead, judge—state your verdict," General Gleason roared.

"By no means," Laverty cried. "If there's a hope for the prisoner, he shall have it!"

All eyes were directed prairieward, where, coming toward the town, at a run, was a horse and rider, the latter waving his hat in the air, to attract attention.

It was an exciting moment!

It was a moment of hope, for Little Quick-Shot, at least.

In five minutes the horseman, a sun-browned Texan, drew rein beside the trial stand.

"Speak!" the major cried.

"I have a letter for the judge, in this 'ere case," the man panted. "It was given to me by a handsome horseman, who gave me fifty dollars to fetch it here, as quick as boss-flesh could do it!"

Judge Laverty received the letter, glanced it over, and then said:

"It is from the man who murdered Ralph Ronald. Donald Waverly, you are a free man!"

A cheer arose from the lips of the multitude, that made the welkin ring!

"Hurrah! hip! hip! hurrah for Little Quick-Shot!"

"Silence!" shouted the major. "Judge, be kind enough to read the letter!"

Laverty obeyed, and this is what he read:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:—"

"Having learned that one person, called Little Quick-Shot, or the Scarlet Scout, has been arrested, (and is likely to be convicted) for the murder of Ralph Ronald, I wish to correct the mistake, and do the man justice, although I believe him to be a detective, whose mission to these parts is to arrest me and my Cattle Clique. I killed Ralph Ronald, but by mistake. I chased him ten miles, believing him to be one of my men who had deserted. As I have since found my man, the man I toppled over last night must have been Ralph Ronald, as I overtook him not far to the south of the Cottonwoods."

"Yours to command,

"CAP. MELTON."

The judge then turned to Mr. Ronald.

"Is this explanation convincing to you, sir, that Donald Waverly is guiltless of the murder of your son?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Then, this precious gang of perjurers—Hello! they're gone!"

It was even so! While the judge was reading Cap. Melton's letter, every one was so intent in listening to him, that Brady and his pals slipped from the platform without attracting attention, and were now gone.

"Those scoundrels shall be made to pay dearly for their collusion with General Gleason!" Quick-Shot said. "Leave that part of it to me!"

"You are, then, a detective?" the judge asked.

"I am. My business in these parts is to break up that organization known as the Cattle Clique, provided I am not too busily occupied in defending myself from the attacks of private citizens."

"As Buck Brady will necessarily have to keep shady, and at best has forfeited his rights, as deputy-sheriff, I propose that we appoint Quick-Shot to fill Brady's office," Mr. Ronald said. "All in favor, make manifest."

A rousing cheer went up.

That was enough!

Donald Waverly was deputy-sheriff of Daggersville; and Gideon Gleason realized that, after all, he was not a man of so much power and importance as he had been.

Biting his lip with chagrin, he wheeled his horse about to ride away.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAR TO THE END!

BUT the general was not destined to depart yet.

Old Man Ronald called him back.

"Hold up, general! You have forgotten something, haven't you?"

Gleason gave him a scowl, and then drew rein.

"I believe I have!" he growled. "Come into the Cinnamon Bear, and we will settle our differences in private."

"As you like, sir."

In five minutes the two foes and the major were closeted in a private parlor.

Outside, the topic of excitement had undergone a change—the quarrel between the two men of means, and its probable result, being upon the lips of every one.

Inside the parlor, the two men faced each other, stern and angry.

The major stood at one side, grasping a pair of revolvers.

"If there's to be any blood shed here, gents, I'll take a hand," he warned. "Order is the rule of my house."

"There's no necessity of bloodshed at present!" Mr. Ronald replied. "Henceforth, unless the general apologizes, we are bitter enemies, and this portion of the country is not big enough to hold the two of us."

"You never spoke a truer truth!" Gleason cried. "My hatred for you can never abate until you are overwhelmed with ruin and disgrace, or are dead."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen! no good can come of such a state of affairs!" protested Greer.

"I give the general an hour to pack his things, and leave for parts unknown. If he don't, he will regret it!" threatened Ronald.

"You cannot intimidate me, you English rascal!" was the general's defiance.

"I'll spend every cent I'm worth, but what I'll bring you to the level of the lowest of the class of wretches with whom you consort," avowed Ronald. "And I'll fight you on sight. Is this understood?"

"As far as I am concerned it is."

"Then so be it!"

"The word is given. Open the door, major. The matter is settled."

The major obeyed, and the two men passed out.

The general mounted his horse, and rode toward Villa Voselle.

Old Man Ronald remained about the camp awhile, making some arrangements for his son's burial.

For Major Greer to keep a secret was equally as hard for him as to make himself thin in flesh in a day; consequently news of the declared war between the two moneyed factions, was spread all over the town, within an hour, and groups of people conversed in awed tones, here and there about the street.

About the time Ronald was ready to proceed homeward, he was suddenly hemmed in by a crowd of miners and others, who were captained by no less a personage than Little Quick-Shot.

"You will excuse us, Mr. Ronald," the detective said, "but I have been prevailed upon by those who now surround you, to address you, on a, to them, important subject."

"Relative to the quarrel between General Gleason and myself, I presume?"

"Exactly. These people believe that a desperate struggle for the mastery is on the tapis, between you. Is this so?"

"Without doubt. War has been declared between us, and I know the old soldier too well to believe that he will allow it to be a civil or peaceable one. He will, I calculate, mass all his men around him, and endeavor to drive me off my estate and to destroy it, as a first act. What will follow, I do not yet know."

"Have you any idea, sir, what number of men he can call to his aid, in case of such an attempt?"

"Hardly. He has something like half a hundred men in his employ, and they can perhaps influence as many more."

"How about your forces?"

"I have but fifty cowboys, but they are as true as steel!"

"You are wrong in your count. The fifty odd men at my back signify their readiness to see you through. Am I right, boys?"

"Ay! ay!" came the hearty response in a chorus.

"I am grateful for your proffered support, gentlemen!" Mr. Ronald said. "for as you form a majority in the camp, I believe we can hold it and the Cottonwoods."

"Right you be!" Quick Shot assented. "With you in command at the Cottonwoods, and Major Greer, here, it will be better than though the whole force were condensed in one position, eh, major?"

"Certainly. But, hadn't you better take command, sir?"

"Oh, no. You are too old a soldier for me to cut out; then, too, I can be of more service as a scout and spy."

"He is right," Old Man Ronald decided. "Get your men together, major, swear them in, plant your flag where it can be seen, and throw out trusty men for picket duty—in fact, take all warlike precautions, for Gleason won't be idle. I'll go to the Cottonwoods, and do likewise. Drive every person of over ten years of age from the town, who refuses to swear loyalty to our cause."

"Will you bury your son, at once, sir?"

"Yes—it is better I should, under the circumstances."

"I think so, too. Hello! yonder comes a horseman from the Cottonwoods. It is he who brought the letter awhile ago. He rides like mad!" the major cried.

"My God! what can be the matter now?" Mr. Ronald gasped, staggering, his face deathly white. "This time I feel sure he brings bad news."

"Hope for the best, and don't give way, even at the worst," Donald said, supporting him.

Antonio, the herder, soon drew rein in their midst, flushed and excited.

"Speak!" Ronald gasped. "Out with it, be it what it may!"

"It's bad news, sir. The body of your son is not to be found. It has been stolen!"

The speculator uttered a groan of anguish, and fell into Quick-Shot's arms, in a faint.

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING READY.

"BY HEAVEN! This is bad!" the major cried. "What devilment is this? Are you sure, Antonio? Have you made a thorough search?"

"We have, sir, but not the least trace of the body can be found about the premises, nor even a clew to the strange disappearance. The body lay in the parlor, and was visited every few minutes by Miss Ruth, and a servant, who kept a wet cloth over the face. It was on one of these visits a few minutes ago, that the discovery was made that the corpse was gone."

"Strange! strange! What do you think about the matter, Quick-Shot?"

"To tell the truth, major, I am rather puzzled, myself," the Scarlet Scout replied.

"There can be but two ways about the matter: either the young man wasn't dead and has recovered and skipped out, or else his remains have been stolen, for a purpose. The best thing we can do, is to arouse Mr. Ronald, and let him and the judge and Rentfrew go down to the Cottonwoods, and personally investigate, while you attend to matters here. I will help you get things in shape, for awhile; then I have a little business to attend to elsewhere."

Mr. Ronald was soon restored to consciousness, and shortly afterward, he, Rentfrew and the judge set out for the Cottonwoods, Antonio having preceded them.

After they were gone, the major once more brought the trial stand into use.

He and Quick-Shot mounted it, and the major made a brief address, stating the resolve of the larger part of the populace to stand by the owner of the Cottonwoods, and warning those who were averse to being sworn into Ronald's service to at once quit the town, under the penalty of imprisonment.

The work of swearing in then commenced in earnest, and continued the remainder of the forenoon, during which time seventy able-bodied men were secured, together with their families.

This left only about a dozen who refused to join the Ronald movement, among them being Buck Brady and his five pals.

"You've got to either swear loyalty to our cause, and stick to your oath under penalty of death, or you've got to quit the town!" the fat major declared. "That can't be no split in our side of the ticket!"

"S'posin' we won't do nothin' o' the kind!" Buck Brady growled, with an ugly leer. "I guess you hain't got no right to boss us around."

"You have heard what I said!" Greer returned calmly. "I'll give ye an hour to make up your minds."

The work of preparing for the struggle went rapidly on.

A tall pole was planted, in plain view of Villa Voselle, and a large American flag run up.

Almost immediately afterward a tattered Confederate flag floated to the breeze from the staff on the cupola of Villa Voselle!

"Hooray!" the major cried, executing a clumsy jig. "This puts me in mind of old times! Won't we make these new rebels scatter, though!"

Ten men were detailed for picket duty, on the various approaches to the town. Twenty more set to work throwing up a breastwork on the eastern slope, looking toward Villa Voselle. Others were detailed to get together and inventory all the ammunition in the camp, and it was found that there was enough to last for a protracted siege, together with a sufficient quantity of weapons.

When everything was very nearly in readiness Quick-Shot paid a visit to the little lone cabin up the gulch.

He found a cheery scene there, that made his heart beat with pride and gladness.

Lenore had exchanged her costly attire for a neat but more inexpensive suit, and was busied in putting her new home to rights, singing the while like an unfettered bird released from its prison.

Already she had transformed the miners' rude and humble place into the semblance of a home, by many little improvements and touches peculiar to a woman's hand.

"Oh! Don, how you startled me!" she cried, joyfully, flying to his embrace, as he crossed the threshold. "What do you think of our home, as compared with last night?"

"You have the art of making a lowly hut a charming home, my darling," and he kissed her fondly. "But I fear it will not be our lot to remain here long."

"Why, Don? oh! please tell me what has gone wrong—for I see by your face it is something not connected with your arrest. I have had forebodings of trouble, all the forenoon. Then, too, after you tell me, I've something to tell you."

He led her to a seat and placed her upon his knee.

"There is trouble brewing, Lenore—bitter trouble, born of sudden-born hatred, which can only end in bloodshed. Your father and Old Man Ronald have quarreled, and are even now planning the preliminaries of war against one another, with a view of driving each other from the happy home he owns, down the grade to ruin, disgrace, and death!"

"Oh! Donald!"

"It is true, dear, and not to be helped."

"But, who caused this feud?"

"As far as the past is concerned, I know not. As far as the present, and what I have seen of it, your father has been grossly in error, and insulting in the highest degree—not only to me, but to Mr. Ronald, the major, and others. To cap the climax, he has outlawed himself in the eyes of every good citizen, by unfurling the rebel flag, over Villa Voselle!"

Lenore bowed her head a moment; then a strange hardness of expression crept over her beautiful face.

"Well, the die is cast. I have often chided him for his terrible temper, only to receive unwarranted abuse for my pains. He has been a father to me only in name, and as he has made his bed, so must he abide by it. I have nothing to regret in the choice I have made!"

"Bless you, Lenore—nor may you ever have cause for regret. Now, dear, tell me what you promised."

"Oh! yes. An hour ago, I was startled near out of my wits. On chancing to look toward the door, I saw an Indian girl standing there, richly attired, and very beautiful, so far as Indian beauty goes!"

The face of Little Quick-Shot suddenly assumed a peculiar pallor, which fact did not escape Lenore's sharp eyes, and she involuntarily drew away from him.

"Don't," he entreated. "Go on, then. I will explain all."

"Can you?"

"Truthfully, as God bears me witness."

"Well, she asked me for a glass of water, and then demanded to know if this was the home of the Scarlet Scout. I said that it was, but that you were not at home. She regarded me piteously for a moment, then asked me if I was your wife. I replied that I was, and then she said: 'Silver Dove is also the wife of Scarlet Scout, but he no longer loves her. Tell him, when he comes, that Flat Nose and his warriors are on his trail. Silver Dove has news for him.' She then turned and fled."

"Lenore, the girl is crazy. Even her father, Flat Nose, will tell you so. Once I visited their camp, on a fur trade, and she insisted that I was her husband. She has followed me ever since, and I believe has influenced her father to give credence to her claim. That explains all. I have no love for red-skins, of either sex."

"I believe you, Don, and that I am the only one you love. How long are we to remain here?"

"You can safely stay here until developments as to your father's plans are more plain; then I will come and take you to the Cottonwoods."

"Then you are going away again?"

"Yes; it is necessary that I should get back to Daggersville, as my services may be needed at any minute. You are not afraid to remain here?"

"Oh! no. I will keep the door closed, and I don't think any one will disturb me."

He kissed her, and took his departure.

CHAPTER X.

THE DARKEST DEED OF ALL.

Night drew on apace, bringing with it unmistakable evidences of another nocturnal tempest.

At the mining-town, preparations for a siege were nearly perfected, and it but remained for those who had sworn to fight for Old Man Ronald to stand ready for orders.

Buck Brady, refusing to take the acquired oath, had quitted the camp and gone down to Villa Voselle, as had his five pals. Their departure left the camp without an untrustworthy recruit.

About an hour before sunset, the discovery was made that a large band of cowboys and herders had come in, and were camped out around Villa Voselle, and that they numbered nearly all of Gleason's forces. A few, perhaps, had been left upon the range to keep the cattle from stampeding.

"It begins to look like war in earnest," the major remarked, as he called Little Quick-Shot's attention to the collecting forces. "I don't see why Ronald don't call in his herders."

"Maybe he prefers to wait until night to do that, so that Gleason won't know the exact number of his force. Do you contemplate an attack during the night?"

"I do not; but if I am not mistaken, Gleason will make an initial charge before morning. He is a hot-headed old fighter, and as revengeful as you often find 'em."

"I'll try to slip into the enemy's camp as soon as it comes dark," Quick-Shot said, "and see what their plans are."

Shortly afterward, he sauntered down to Grit Gleason's cigar store, and entered. As he did so, a man was standing by the counter conversing with the pretty proprietress—a tall, athletic personage, well dressed, a free and easy manner, and as handsome as an Apollo.

A strange cry escaped Little Quick-Shot at sight of him, and, drawing his revolver, he covered the man with deadly aim.

"At last!" he cried, sternly, causing Grit and her companion to wheel about in startled surprise.

"Oh! Mr. Waverly! What do you mean?"

the girl cried in alarm, while a tinge of grayish pallor swept over the Apollo's face.

"I mean that good fortune has found me the man I am here to capture."

"You have made a mistake, sir. This is my friend, Mr. Tabor, whom I was speaking to you about, and I am sure you can have nothing against him!"

"Indeed, Tabor is a very good name, Miss Gleason, where a man wants to screen his own identity, but you see I happen to know your obliging friend, a little better than you do. He is most popularly known as Cap. Melton, chief of the Cattle Clique, of which you may have heard."

"'Tis false, my name is Tabor!" the outlaw growled, watching for a chance to draw a weapon.

"Your name, so far as I am concerned, is Cap. Melton," Quick-Shot replied. "You know I have been after you for a year, but until now, you have cunningly eluded my grasp."

"Well, what are you going to do about it, if all you claim is true?"

Bulldog ferocity was in the expression that had settled over his face.

"It depends somewhat on circumstances," Quick-Shot replied. "You are aware that were your presence here made known, your life would not be worth the air you breathe."

"Perhaps not."

"Then, why do you venture here—to spy upon us, for the benefit of the enemy, or to plan a raid on your own account?"

"Neither. Perhaps I was bold to venture my neck into jeopardy, but allow me to say that I did it with an honorable motive, to see this estimable young lady, whom it has been a pleasure to me to slightly befriend. So far as hostility is concerned, I came for no such purpose."

"Be it so, then. Murderer though you are, and thief, too, I think you are telling me the truth. I suppose, however, you know what my duty is."

"I am not dumb. If your duty is to arrest me, go ahead and do it."

"But it is not my intention to do any thing of the kind. Were I to capture you as being Cap. Melton, the people would cut you to pieces before you could even beg for mercy. You saved my life on the murder case; I now offer you an opportunity to put miles between you and this camp. Then we are the same as before, and the next time I capture you I shall not let you go!"

"The next time you do catch me you need not let me go," Melton replied, with a hard laugh. He then turned to Grit:

"You have heard all—you know I deceived you in name, but it was only because I feared to make known my real name, lest you should spurn me. You know me now, as I am, and that you are all in all to me. Will you go with me?"

"No! Once deceived is often enough. I can never be caught to you—indeed, never thought of such a thing!" Grit replied.

"You lie!" the outlaw cried, fiercely. "Until this detective devil came you thought well of me. Now your fickle mind has taken a fancy to him. But, oh! wait! I'll dispel any such dream as that. I have yet to get even with the both of you, and I'll do it or die in the attempt!"

And, shaking his fist at them, he turned and strode from the store.

Quick-Shot watched him from the door until he was out of sight beyond the camp; then he turned to Grit:

"Well, you see what a nice fellow Mr. Tabor is?" he smiled.

"I see that you have removed a snake from my path, and I am very grateful to you for the act," she replied. "I did, indeed, believe him to be a nice gentleman until now, for he talked so nicely and acted so refined."

"He is a polished rascal—a dangerous devil, and you will need to keep your eyes open lest he nabs you when you least think."

Darkness fell like a shroud over the earth, blotting out all objects from human gaze. The heavens were overcast with ominous clouds, and a mist fell over everything.

No report had reached the village from the Cottonwoods, where all was somber and silent. The same might be said of Villa Voselle, in which direction not a light was to be seen.

"There is mischief brewing!" Quick-Shot declared, as he and Greer stood by a camp fire, near the Cinnamon Bear. "I feel it in my bones, as the saying is."

"Hark!" the major rejoined.

A heart-rending scream pierced the air. A woman in tattered dress, and with hair disheveled, rushed into the camp, tottered, and fell at Little Quick-Shot's feet.

They raised her, saw the blood gushing from a dagger wound in her breast—saw that she was dead—saw that it was Lenore!

Then, as if to mock their horrified anguish, came to them, borne on the chill night air, a wild, exultant laugh—a laugh demoniac!

"My God! that was the general!" Major Greer gasped. "He has murdered his own child!"

CHAPTER X.

QUICK-SHOT'S RIGHT PARD.

PEN could but illy picture the emotion of Don Waverly, as he knelt beside his murdered bride, and gazed into the beautiful face, already setting in the rigid whiteness of death.

He spoke not, nor did a sob escape him, or a tear dim his eye, but his breast heaved heavily, and there came over his face an expression of one whose emotion could not find vent in tears—an awful look, embodying the bitterest intensity of two passions—anguish and anger.

"Are you sure it was the general's voice?" with a calmness that caused the major to shudder.

"It sounded wonderfully like his!" Greer replied.

"Then, attend to her, till I make sure. She is dead—I shall go crazy if I stay here!" and before the major could check him, the Scarlet Scout had leaped off into the darkness.

The scream had attracted general attention, and it was but a few minutes ere the whole camp knew of Lenore's sad fate.

She was tenderly raised, and borne into the parlor of the Cinnamon Bear; where left in charge of Grit, and a couple of miners' wives, who volunteered to remain with the dead.

Although fat and fifty, Major Greer was by no means inactive in a time of peril, and believing he would see no more of Little Quick-Shot, for the night, he strengthened the guards, and sent out a couple of spies, to reconnoiter in the immediate vicinity of the camp.

Their reports, however, were that they saw nothing to indicate trouble.

In half an hour Quick-Shot returned. His face still wore that awful expression, and every one shuddered when they saw his eyes. They were those of a madman, rather than of a sane person; they burned like coals of fire, in their stern, piercing glance.

On being told where Lenore had been laid, he entered the parlor, and asked to be left alone with the beautiful dead for an hour.

When he once more appeared upon the street, there was no noticeable change in his appearance, except that if anything his face had grown sterner.

"What did you learn?" the major demanded, anxiously.

"Enough!" was the answer. "I arrived at Villa Voselle about two minutes before the general. It was he who laughed. His fate is sealed. Henceforth my life shall know no rest, my mind no peace, until I have avenged Lenore. Get your force in readiness, for I anticipate an attack, about midnight."

He went, then, and threw himself upon the ground by one of the camp-fires, and gazed into the fire, as if oblivious of all else than that which he searched for in its depths.

Yet that he was on the alert no one had a doubt; many believed he had become partly insane over his sudden and terrible loss.

Sufficiently sane was he, however, to catch the utterance of his name, and he sprung nimbly to his feet as he saw a pretty Indian girl standing near him, in company with the major.

"She insisted on seeing you, saying that she had news!" the major explained. "Do you know her?"

"I have seen her. She belongs to a band of renegade reds, whose chief is called Flat Nose!"

He then turned to the girl, who was regarding him wistfully.

"What does Silver Dove want in the camp of the pale-face?" he demanded, rather sternly.

"Silver Dove has news for the Scarlet Scout," was the answer, in the Sioux tongue. "Is the Scarlet Scout angry because Silver Dove brings him news?"

"No. Speak out what you have to say!"

"It is not good news Silver Dove brings. Flat Nose and his warriors are in the neighborhood, and have allied themselves to another band of pale-faces, who will attack this camp.

Silver Dove comes to warn the Scarlet Scout to fly to a place of safety."

"The Silver Dove does not know the Scarlet Scout. He never takes a back trail, nor retreats before the advance of an enemy."

"Scarlet Scout is a great brave, but he knows not of the odds against him. Flat Nose, alone, has a hundred warriors, and has sworn to have the scalp of the Scarlet Scout."

"Bah! he hasn't got it yet. Wait!"

Quick-Shot then called the major aside, and related what he had just learned.

"It looks devilish bad," the major muttered. "They've got over two to our one, I reckon, and we'll have to do some big fightin' to lick 'em, specially as they're part Injuns."

"I think we can fetch 'em. I shall take the Silver Dove a captive and secrete her where a hundred years' search might not find her. I will then go and make terms with Flat Nose."

"Are you not afraid to enter the enemy's camp?"

"No; I fear not the whole gang, so far as my own safety is concerned. They shall understand that harm to me, means death to the Silver Dove!"

He then turned to the Indian girl, his hand grasping a revolver.

"The Scarlet Scout is grateful to the Silver Dove, for her warning, but he must use strategy, to baffle the enemy. Silver Dove is Scarlet Scout's prisoner, until Flat Nose leaves the enemy, and comes over to our side. Come! you must go with me!"

"Silver Dove is not afraid to follow where the Scarlet Scout leads. Her heart is already with him, and she fears not to become his captive," the girl replied, humbly.

"It is well. Come!"

He procured his rifle, and led the way out of the camp, into the pass.

Within an hour he was back again, but the Indian girl was not with him.

"Any news?" he asked, meeting the major on the street.

"None, except that camp-fires have been built, at the villa, and the movements of the men seem to indicate that preparations are being made for an attack."

"Well, look out for yourselves, as best you can, until I return. I may return immediately, but cannot say for a certainty. If an attack is made, I will not be far away."

Just as he was about to start for Villa Voselle, he met Grit Gleason. She was dressed in boy's clothing, wore a jaunty sombrero, and was well armed with revolvers, knife and rifle.

"Where are you going?" Little Quick-Shot demanded, in surprise.

"With you!" she replied, confidently.

"With me?"

"You bet! You are going into danger, and I am going to share it with you. Until Lenore's death is avenged, consider me your pard, through thick and thin!"

"You surprise me, Miss Gleason. You are in no wise fitted to rough about as I do. I beg of you to consider. You are foolishly risking your life—and, what for?"

"If I risk my life, I may be able to save yours—for Lenore's sake," she replied. "Go ahead. I am going with you."

Quick-Shot hesitated a moment, and then led the way from the camp in silence.

The girl's strange resolve was a puzzler to him, yet he began to see into her motive, and it caused him the keenest pain to make the discovery.

She had, in that very act, betrayed her love for him!

They were not long in reaching the immediate vicinity of the Gleason residence. The house was not lit up, but camp-fires burned here and there, about the lawn, and cowboys, armed to the teeth, were gathered around them.

Outside of the grounds, on the rear of the mansion, was another encampment, and it was here the Indians and half breeds of Flat Nose's gang were located.

Ascertaining this, Quick-Shot crept cautiously that way, Grit following close at his heels. They soon gained a position where they could overlook the whole red-skin camp. There were three fires, and about these were collected a hundred or more wild, villainous-looking redskins and half-breeds, the majority of whom wore war-paint, and were attired in filthy and ragged citizen's garb, and hats of all conceivable shapes and styles.

They were well armed, however, and looked precisely what they were, a band of hardened cut-throats.

Pacing to and fro about the camp, was a stalwart savage, whom Little Quick Shot re-

cognized as Flat Nose, the chief of the marauding gang. He was a majestic-looking Indian, and the only one of his party who was attired in his native costume.

"I hardly know just how to get speech with him, without venturing into the camp!" Little Quick-Shot said, "and I have a wish to retain my scalp for awhile longer, at least. If good fortune would only send him this way, I should be greatly obliged, indeed."

But, good fortune did not seem to have her machine in motion, just then, for Flat Nose made no move to accommodate the scout-detective, by presenting himself for an interview.

"I have an idea!" Grit said, after they had watched the camp-fires for awhile. "Suppose I go into camp, claim to be the general's daughter, and tell Flat Nose that the general wants to see him, here, alone."

"You'd not catch the old red rascal on such bait as that. Your proposal, however, suggests a plan that may work, so that two heads are better than one."

He took a memorandum-book from his pocket, and wrote upon it the following message:

"FLAT NOSE:—Your daughter, Silver Dove, is a captive of the pale-faces, at Daggersville, and if you attempt to attack the town she will be killed and scalped. If you and your band come over to our side, your daughter will be restored to you. Take your choice. If you will join our party, fire a pistol in the air, and send your men, one by one, up to our camp. Remember, any treachery on your part will seal the doom of the Silver Dove!"

"LITTLE QUICK-SHOT."

After writing this message, the scout searched about until he found a fair-sized pebble, around which he securely wrapped the paper.

"Flat Nose can read English perfectly well, and this will do as well as an interview!" he said.

"After I hurl it into the camp, however, we shall have to run for it to get out of easy reach!"

He then measured the distance with his eagle eye, and hurled the missile toward where Flat Nose was standing.

It struck the grim old savage in the stomach, and dropped at his feet.

Without waiting to watch the effect, Quick-Shot and Grit ran swiftly back into the darkness for several hundred yards before they paused.

Then they heard an indistinct hubbub of voices, and knew that the message had been discovered, and was creating a sensation.

For a few minutes all suddenly became silent.

Quick-Shot's keen gaze never once left the direction of the encampment, and Grit hovered near him, equally anxious and interested.

"What do you think they are doing?" Grit asked.

"I don't know. The knoll yonder hides them from our view. You remain here, and I will reconnoiter a bit. Don't move from here lest I lose you."

Slinging his rifle to his back, he crept away through the grass, and was soon lost to view.

Ten minutes fled, and Grit grew anxious.

"Can it be that they have captured him?" she murmured. "It seems to me something must have happened."

Ten minutes more passed; still the Scarlet Scout did not return. Grit now was deeply alarmed.

The camp-fires were dying out, and gloom was enveloping the places where they had burned.

"I cannot stand this suspense," the girl muttered. "I must try to find out what has become of Donald."

Drawing a revolver, she crept in the direction that Little Quick-Shot had gone.

In a few minutes she came in sight of the spot where the Indian encampment had been.

The smoldering embers of the camp-fires alone remained.

Nor was there much light beyond the villa, where the cowboys had been encamped.

What did it all mean?

Were the united forces in the villa, or had they crept toward the Cottonwoods to make an attack?

The latter was the most likely theory; yet Grit was not content to believe anything she was not sure of, especially on such a critical night as this; so she stole like a shadow toward the villa, and made a reconnoissance entirely around it, without discovering a sign of human presence.

Both the camps were deserted.

The blackest of gloom reigned supreme in the direction of the Cottonwoods.

Up at the mining-camp only, a star-like light was visible here and there.

The rain began to pelt down heavily, and warned the Scarlet Scout's fair part that it was high time for her to be returning to camp, but she knew it must be by a roundabout way, for the enemy were undoubtedly between her and Dagersville.

"It must be that Quick-Shot has gone to warn the people at our camp, or at the Cottonwoods!" she said, aloud. "I don't believe he has been captured or I should have heard more confusion. I think I had better go to camp at all events, as it seems strangely lonesome here."

"Then, may be you'd like a bit of company!" a mocking voice cried, and in an instant her arms were seized and held in a firm grasp.

Simultaneously there was a chorus of hoarse yells in the distance, a roar of rifle-shots, and a myriad of quick flashes both in the direction of the Cottonwoods and Dagersville.

Both places had been attacked at once.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIEND'S REVENGE.

LET us follow the adventures of the Scarlet Scout for a few moments.

After leaving Grit Gleason, he glided stealthily toward the Indian camp, his every sense on the alert, his eye gleaming sternly.

The excitement of his desire to prevent an attack upon Dagersville had banished something of the vengeful expression from his face, but enough still lingered to tell of the shock he had sustained.

As soon as he once more came within view of the fires he saw the old chief reading the message, while his dusky warriors were huddled near, awaiting his edict.

The chief finished the perusal of the document, and then saying something to his warriors, which Quick-Shot could not understand, hurried away toward the villa.

"I wonder what he's up to now?" our hero mused, grimly.

He left his position, made a circuit around the camp-fires and came to a halt near a rear door of the villa, which was open.

Near by was a thick hedge of syringa bushes and among these he lost no time in taking concealment.

He was none too soon.

Flat Nose and the general soon made their appearance in the doorway, where they halted.

"Your plan is a good one!" the general said, aloud. "I will give instructions to the boys at once to move upon the Cottonwoods. You and your reds can easily carry the mining-camp!"

"Flat Nose great chief. His warriors heap big fighters. The White Whiskers must keep his promise, though!"

"My word is good. When you have served me as I have said, you can go away loaded with plunder. Let not any threats or persuasions draw you over to the other side, for I'll do three better by you than they will."

"Flat Nose has heard. He will act accordingly!" the old cut-throat answered, with a dignified air, as he descended the steps and strode away.

The general also descended the steps, and walked around to the front part of the grounds to order his men to the attack.

"Now is my time!" Quick-Shot muttered. "Vengeance for Lenore, first; then I'll do what I can for the others!"

He grasped a revolver in either hand, and glided from his place of concealment into the house like a shadow.

The door opened into a sort of rear store-room; then came a kitchen and a dining-room, from off of which opened a large hall, leading to other portions of the dwelling.

Little Quick-Shot had gone as far as the dining-room, when he fancied he heard some one in the inky darkness, ahead of him.

He naturally paused and endeavored to penetrate the gloom with his eagle eyes, but it was a fatal action.

An unseen object, as hard as rock, whizzed through the air, and struck him with stunning force upon the head, causing him to drop like a log.

Then all was blank to him, except that an awful buzzing sensation held him captive, precluding all possibility of simplest thought.

When he regained consciousness and slowly opened his eyes, he found the situation altogether different.

As far as he could make out, he was lying upon the prairie, a short distance from the villa—lying on his back, so completely wound up with lariat as to be nearly unable to move a muscle.

Another person similarly fixed was lying by his side.

Near their feet was a powerful horse, about which three men were busied.

Up at Dagersville, and in the direction of the Cottonwoods, the sounds of a deadly conflict were to be heard, accompanied by an almost incessant flash of weapons, that lit up the darkness like so many hisses of lightning.

The rain was falling steadily.

A shudder ran through the frame of the scout-detective as he comprehended his situation. He was to be "railroaded"—dragged furiously over prairie and through rocky gorges at the mercy of an animal furious to escape from its human freight.

It was sure death in nine cases out of ten, as he well knew—a punishment that more than one poor fellow has had to suffer on the Western borders.

Who was his *compagnon du voyage*?

He managed to twist his head so as to get a partial view of the party.

"Great God! Is it you, Miss Gleason?" he gasped.

"You bet!" Grit responded.

"But, how came you in this sad predicament?"

"They nabbed me. I was looking after you."

"You should not have done it. Are you aware what is in store for us, my poor child?"

"Yes. The general condensed so far as to explain to me. It is evident we will get what some of our friends are even now getting, only in a different way."

"Death!"

"Yes."

"I am afraid you are right. I am not so much concerned for myself, as for you; as I can stand more hard usage. I went through this ordeal once before."

"Don't worry about me. I am not a coward, by any means, and if you have to face the music I am with you, and we will meet it as best we can."

"You are brave, Miss Gleason, but I would to God you were well out of this scrape!"

Just then, the men evidently completed their arrangements about the horse, for two of them came and bent over the captives.

They were General Gleason and the ruffian, Buck Brady, and their faces, glowing with exultation, were not pleasant to contemplate.

"So you have recovered, eh?" the general said, addressing Little Quick-Shot. "I am glad of that. I was afraid Brady had killed you, and you wouldn't be able to enjoy the treat that is in store for you."

"Thank you, murderer; I am quite alive yet. If I were free, I'd not delay in making the fact forcibly known to you."

"But you see you haven't as much liberty as you might have. Your natural freshness, makes it imperative that you should seek other fields of sport and adventure, and so we are going to give you free transportation. If you have time, while being torn along over rock and turf, for sober thought, you will see what it costs to trifle with a man of my stamp!"

"Murderer though you are, I fear you not. Do your worst—I still defy you, Gideon Gleason, and will live to see the day that I can avenge Lenore's death!"

"What! Lenore's death! Speak up, man! For God's sake what do you mean?"

"I mean, you vile hypocrite and assassin, that I will yet have your heart's blood for killing my bride!" Quick-Shot uttered, with ringing sternness. "Go ahead! do your work. My turn will come next!"

"Do you dare to tell me that Lenore is dead, you young devil?"

"I have already said so, and know that for spite's satisfaction, against me, you murdered her—you, her own father!"

"You lie—you lie!" fairly shrieked the man.

"I do not. You are a cowardly assassin, and, God helping me, if I ever get free, I'll have your life in exchange for the murder of your own daughter—you inhuman fiend!"

Gleason uttered a snarling oath.

"You are counting your chickens before they are hatched!" he declared triumphantly. "So far as your ever getting free is concerned, I'll guarantee that we shall never have the pleasure of looking on either of your faces again. As for you, Miss Gertrude, I'll tell the truth by admitting that I would rest a little easier, were you out of the way; hence I concluded to let you keep the company of the Scarlet Scout on his voyage!"

"I understand why you fear me!" Grit replied.

"It is because you have robbed me of my property—ay! I believe you murdered my poor father. It is fear of being proven guilty of the crime, that you send me to destruction. May

the curse of every honest man rest upon you, you detestable wretch!"

The general winced under the accusation, and turned impatiently to Buck Brady.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "Apply the match!"

The horse which the third man was holding by the bit, was already becoming nearly unmanageable, and when Brady applied a lighted match to his glossy coat he gave a terrified snort, and broke away, dragging the helpless human freight behind him.

For, on application of the match, he had burst out into a sheet of flame from head to foot.

He had been saturated with kerosene oil, by the inhuman general and his equally inhuman aids!

Away! away! the terrified animal plunged, leaving a sheet of weird light behind—a signal-light to Quick-Shot's and Grit Gleason's horrible doom.

On! on! until a swell in the prairie hid from view both horse and its victims; then the general turned to Brady and nodded his approval.

"They're gone beyond return!" he said. "No human being could survive being dragged at the heels of that animal, I'll guarantee!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SATAN CLAIMS HIS OWN.

THE terrible battle—or more properly, the massacre—at Dagersville, was over. It had been brief, but of sickening import. The double attack had thrown the forces under Major Greer and Old Man Ronald, respectively, into a terrible state of confusion, and the assailants had poured in an avalanche of molten death upon the defenders, which must have demoralized a small army.

Nevertheless, either band of defenders had made a desperate struggle to attain victory, and had, almost to a man, fallen while still fighting.

What had not been completely mowed down, had taken to flight, with few exceptions.

Old Man Ronald and the major, together with two others, of the Ronald mining syndicate, named Lewis and Locke, had been numbered among the missing, when a list of the dead and wounded was taken.

Yet, there were those who knew that the quartette of capitalists had been captured, and smuggled off to Villa Voselle, where they were secretly held as prisoners of the victorious general.

What was to be done with them, was a matter of conjecture with those who were in the secret, they being Buck Brady, Flat Nose and Pedro, the general's valet.

It was believed, however, that they were to be held for ransom, or some other arrangement by which the general would come into actual possession of Dagersville, the Cottonwoods and the surrounding territory.

The loss on the general's side had been heavy, many of his best herders having been dropped, never to rise again.

Flat Nose's band, however, had come off nearly whole.

The morning after the battle, the dead were collected, by the general's orders, and given a rough but respectable burial, near the Cottonwoods, and the general sent divisions of his party to take charge of the Cottonwoods and Dagersville.

For safety's sake, he kept Buck Brady and Flat Nose's gang at camp, on the lawn of Villa Voselle, for as soon as a report of the massacre got abroad, he was sanguine that there would be Government interference, in which case, were it imperative, he might have to beat a retreat into the interior, until the affair could be arranged—as he believed it could readily be—by the agency of money and perjury.

Lenore's remains were removed from the Cinnamon Bear Hotel, and buried at Villa Voselle, and although the general manifested some grief, it was apparent that he had become too hardened and calloused at heart to long grieve over her loss.

A week passed, and no interference was offered from Government sources, although it was believed that the massacre was known at headquarters, and plenty of time had elapsed in which an investigation could have been made.

This caused the general and his confederates to feel more at ease, and things once more began to shape about in their usual way.

Work was resumed in the mines, which were now considered Gleason's property, as was everything else in Dagersville.

He was virtually king, and the people were his minions, and as he paid them with lavish liberality and promptness, there seemed no oc-

casion for belief but what they would serve him, faithfully.

The two immense ranches were turned into one, as it were, and the valuable herds of cattle united into one vast herd, and placed in the care of Flat Nose and his gang; the former remnant of cowboys having been set to work in the mines.

And as trouble was expected from the Cattle Clique, the droves were kept in as close proximity to the Cottonwoods and Villa Voselle, as good pasturage would permit.

Buck Brady and Pedro were now retained at the villa, the former as a sort of confidential cut-throat, and the latter as a confidential servant.

As we have said, the general was daily growing more at ease, as no signs of trouble loomed up on the horizon of his hopes, and he was beginning to congratulate himself that his scheme for supremacy was to be successful, when, one evening, as he was sitting in his parlor, Buck Brady entered, bearing a letter which he had just obtained at the post-office.

There was a post-mark upon it that was not particularly reassuring in its effects upon a nervous mind.

It was round, as post-marks usually are, and the lettering was as follows:

HELL'S
AUG.
20
10 A. M.
POST-OFFICE.

It was directed in a broad, handsome style of chirography, and on tearing away the envelope the general's eyes ran over the appended mis-

"HELL'S POST-OFFICE,
(One Mile from the Entrance Gate to Hades),
August 20th.

"GEN. GIDEON GLEASON:—The time for calling you in from active service has drawn so near expiration that I have deputized several of your victims to wait on you preparatory to guiding you through the dark passages and over the fiery trails leading to my perennial summer resort. Hoping you will not put my envoys to any unnecessary delay (as I have to pay a large premium for fuel now, and have already had the fires kindled for your especial benefit),

"I remain, sir,

"Yours forever,

"SATAN,
"King of the Realms Infernal!"

Brady watched the general with an inquiring expression during the perusal, for the usually flushed face had grown strangely white.

"By Heaven! what does it mean, Brady?" the astonished villain demanded, as he handed over the document to the border ruffian. "One would suppose by that, that we were living on the borders of Inferno."

Brady received the letter, gazed at it, and then at the general.

"Tis rather curious!" he grunted. "The feller what sent it must have forgot to write what he wanted to say."

"What! Can't you read?"

"Depends, guv'nor! I kin allus cipher out common English, but when ye giv me *nothin'* ter read I ain't thar."

"*Nothing!* Why, certainly you can't be getting blind."

"Show me a fifty-dollar gold piece and see how quick I'll gobble onto it. If you say thar's any writin' on that bit o' paper ye've either bin drinkin' an' got the jams or hev gone crazy, or hev got to tellin' whoppin' big lies."

And he thrust the missive back into the general's hand.

That personage gazed at it in utter dismay—his surprise genuine.

"Good God! there is no writing there!" he gasped.

"Nary a bit!" Brady re-echoed.

"Yet I'll take my dying oath that I saw writin'—a letter purporting to be signed by Satan, which warned me that he had sent out envoys to guide me to Hades!"

"General, let me smell yer breath."

"Away, you fool! I have not taken a drop to-day! There's something certainly devilish about this matter."

The message had been written upon half a sheet.

The general examined both sides of the paper thoroughly and then handed it back to Brady.

The moment he gazed at it steadily he uttered a hoarse yell of terror and dropped it to the floor, as though it had been a piece of hot iron.

"What is the matter?" Gleason demanded, his pallor nearly equaling that of the ruffian.

"Oh! cuss the thing! I s'ee'd a skeleton, so I did, what war grinnin' an' snappin' its teeth at me!"

The general made a dive for the paper and seized it before it had floated to the floor.

"Nothing!" he gasped, as he gazed at it on either side.

And then, he held it before Buck Brady's terrified gaze.

"Do you see it, now?" he fairly yelled.

"Mary!" was Brady's gasping reply.

"Did you see it?"

"On course! I did!" doggedly.

"Then, do you believe that I saw what I claimed to see?"

"I hain't a doubt 'bout it."

The two men glared at each other as savagely as two tigers might have done.

"Well!" Brady growled.

"It is not well," the general replied. "It must be more than a human occurrence that could unnerve me, but I am not afraid to tell you that I believe we are doomed."

"Git out! You mean the Old Nick aire grab-b'n' fer us!"

"I am satisfied of it. I am as wide-awake, and my faculties are just as keen as ever; and I know I saw that warning on the same paper you saw the skeleton, and yet neither of us saw the same things. Don't it look as if a power infernal surrounded us?"

Brady scratched his head, and cast a terrified glance about the room.

The words of his master in crime, certainly had no quieting effect on his strong superstition.

"I've heerd," he said, finally, in a low, husky tone, "I've heerd it said, thet ef one could break the charm of the devil, his power were gone. Mebbe if ye war to burn that paper, et would hev the same effect on the old cuss."

"Bah! that is old woman's gabble." Still, he too, gazed nervously about the room. The lamp seemed to burn very dimly. The fire on the grate flickered uneasily. A strong wind moaned about the villa, making weird sounds that were at the best, disquieting.

"Try it!" Brady said, sepulchraly.

The general hesitated, then advanced to the fire-place, and held his hand a few feet above the blaze.

As if eager for the prey, the flames suddenly leaped high enough to singe the man's trembling hands.

A howl of surprise and pain escaped him; he relinquished the paper, and it wavered down into the fire.

Instantaneously there seemed to grow up out of the fire-place, a fleshless skeleton, surrounded by a weird bluish light, that gave it a decidedly unearthly appearance. Where should have been eyeless sockets, were bulging balls of fire, that in expression were not unlike human eyes.

Literally paralyzed with horror, the two villains stared at the spectacle, too dumfounded to stir or speak. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the bony spectre melted down into the flames, and was gone.

For some time after it had disappeared, the two men stood staring at the fire. Brady was the first to arouse.

"It's gone, general, an' I reckon I've hed my fill o' thet sort of thing, fer one night. Ef ye want any more interviews wi' his Satanic Majesty, ye kin stay hyer and enjoy it. I'm nowhere's of a notion ter have my wits frightened out of me."

"Hold, for God's sake!" the general cried.

"If you leave me, I'll never again employ you."

"By thunder, I don't keer ef ye do or not. I kin stand some things but I can't stand everything. I'm goin' right off ter Denver to jine a church, an' see ef I can't ring in a deal wi' pious folks. Then, you sinners can go to the devil, w'at aire reachin' fer ye."

He made a move toward the window as he saw the general making a move to bar him off, but suddenly he paused, an unmistakable expression of horror coming over his hard face.

The reason was very plain.

Buck Brady saw it!

The general saw it!

Both stood transfixed, unable to move or utter a word.

It was the awful Dead Face, that had appeared last upon the night of the reception at the Cottonwoods, unchanged in any part of its ghastly appearance.

It was staring direct at Brady, although the eyes were closed, and as it was thus directed, a hollow, unearthly laugh seemed to peal from between the unparted lips.

An instant—then this spectacle, too, had gone!

It was the termination of that evening's eventful occurrences, and the two terror-stricken men were not sorry when they found that no more visitations were forthcoming.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNMASKING THE VILLAIN.

SEVERAL days passed, but no more of the supernatural order of things took place at Villa Voselle, so that Brady and the general became somewhat more reassured, and satisfied that they were victims of a practical trick, perpetrated by some enemy—most likely Cap. Melton.

The general had not been idle. Believing that trouble might eventually occur out of the massacre, he had been secretly trying to make negotiation for the sale of all the mining and other property for whatever actual cash he could get out of it.

The whole consolidation of properties, at the lowest, ought to bring at least a million or more of dollars, and if he could get hold of this amount, the general was quite content to skip; he therefore wrote prominent agents in the East, making known his desire to close out and retire from business.

Then he set to work to forge deeds to the entire real estate and bills of sale for all personal property, so that it looked all right; for, having once occupied official and legal positions, he had the tools to work with.

A couple of days after the supernatural visitations he received a letter from Denver, at that time by no means as large a city as now.

The letter was as follows:

"GENERAL GIDEON GLEASON:—

"DEAR SIR:—The undersigned, a wealthy English capitalist, having learned of your desire to dispose of your ranch, cattle and mining interests, will, in company with his daughter, call upon you within a day or so prepared to make you a cash offer.

"Very truly yours,

"CHALFONT.

The next day came another:

"GEN'L GIDEON GLEASON:—

"DEAR SIR:—Do not sell your estate until I have time to reach you.

Signed, "W. A. SCOTT,

"In interests of Mackey."

Another communication ran thus:

"GEN'L GIDEON GLEASON:—

"DEAR SIR:—Will call on you shortly with a view to purchasing your estate, if money can buy it.

"Yours resp'y,

"GUS RAND."

The latter two communications had been mailed from a mining-camp not over thirty miles from Dagersville, and both arrived the same day.

"Everything works well. It could hardly be better!" the general congratulated himself. "I'll get what money I can out of the business, and then tie myself to some spot where I shall not constantly feel as if a noose were to be suddenly shirred about my neck."

The first to arrive was Mr. Chalfont and daughter, who were ushered into the general's presence, one stormy evening.

The Englishman was a person of medium build, with a huge silvery beard that covered the better part of his face, and eyes that were intensely keen and penetrating, in their glance.

He was richly attired.

His daughter, Helena, as he introduced her, was closely enveloped in a waterproof, and veiled so carefully that her face could not be seen.

After a little preliminary conversation the visitor said:

"Well, sir, having learned of your desire to dispose of your large property, I concluded to come this way, and learn your terms."

"Exactly. I dare say you are aware of the value of the property?"

"I am. I made inquiries, on my way here, and I am surprised to find so much under one man's control."

"Very likely. I have been most successful in speculation, and am proud to point out my estate as the fruits of my enterprise."

"Everything is clear, of course?"

"To a dollar."

"Then, what is your object in selling out?"

"I recently lost my daughter, an only child, and having no ties to bind me to any particular place I desire to return Eastward to spend the remainder of my days."

"Yes? Well, I suppose you would find more congenial surroundings, there. What value do you place upon your ranch, its stock and equipments, and the mine?"

"Five million of dollars, at least."

"Five million? Would they fetch half that amount at a forced sale?"

"Perhaps. I did not name you my selling price."

"Do so then!"

"I will take one million down, now, and a half million more as soon as the deeds are registered. I have them already prepared, for signing, so that after our business is done here, nothing remains but to take them to a register, and get him to fix them up, he having the old deeds, and their records."

"Indeed! Then you have an idea that I would trust a million of dollars in your hands, for even ten minutes?" was the sneering answer.

"I do not see why not, sir. I am a man of my word, sir!"

"Oh! you are!"

"I am!"

The general was beginning to grow somewhat

alarmed, the tone of his visitor was so cool and significant.

"How long have you owned this magnificent domain?" Chalfont went on, stroking his beard gently, and never once allowing his gaze to leave the general's face.

"For several years—three, nearly."

"Were you ever married, more than once?"

"Certainly not."

"You are sure?"

The general sprang to his feet, growing livid with rage.

"Why do you question my veracity?" he cried. "If you come here to insult me, I will excuse your presence, and request you to leave my house."

He was in the act of drawing a revolver, when he noticed that Chalfont already held one, in his grasp.

"Balked, there!" his caller said, with a chuckle. "You should know better than to try any crooked games on me, Gleason. You are too hot-headed, but I do question your veracity about not having been blessed with two wives, as I know you were legally married once, and illegally married a second time."

"'Tis false!" the general roared.

"It is true!" was the stern cry. "Stand up, Cassie, and remove your veil."

The woman obeyed, and turned a careworn but still pretty face to Gideon Gleason's view—the face of a woman over forty years, mayhap, from which trouble had failed to erase an expression of matronly beauty.

"By heavens!" was all the general could utter, as he staggered back aghast, his gaze riveted upon the woman's face.

Then he suddenly turned upon his tormentor.

"And you—who are you?" he roared, savagely.

"I?" the man chuckled, removing his false beard, "why, I am Cap. Melton, chief of the Cattle Clique, and your dutiful son!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEARFUL RIDE.

It becomes our duty to follow the adventures of Little Quick-Shot and Grit Gleason from the time that they were so rudely dispatched at the heels of the maddened, burning horse.

The lariats that connected them to the animal were securely fastened to their ankles, and the length of the lariat was such that they were not in danger of being harmed by the horse's heels.

For the first five minutes of their frightful journey they were unable to control themselves in the least, the jerk! jerk! occasioned by the animal's frantic bounds nearly taking their senses away, but the horse kept on his course over the prairie, and as there was much grass and no stones, they experienced no severe bruises.

The horse plunged madly on, its agonized screams making the night ring. That he would ever stop until forced to drop from sheer exhaustion did not seem probable.

If he could only get his hands free, so as to draw the clasp-knife which he still had in his pocket, the Scarlet Scout could cut the two lariats; but to get his hands loose was no easy feat, and there was no immediate probability of his accomplishing such release from their frightful position.

Not a word nor groan escaped Grit, she was passing through the ordeal nearly as bravely as himself.

They were well away from Villa Vosselle, when the frantic horse came suddenly to a deep and abrupt stop, and unable to check itself, was forced to plunge headlong into the depths, dragging Donald and Grit with him.

Down, down they went—then all became blank.

Little Quick-Shot was the first to recover consciousness, and, with his returning senses, came a knowledge that he had a severe headache, and was considerably bruised.

He lay several minutes, motionless, until he was satisfied that he was in active possession of his right mind; then, with an effort, he raised himself upon his elbow and gazed about him.

It was broad daylight, but he was still at the bottom of the arroyo, which was rugged and rocky. His bonds had been severed.

It was but a narrow seam or fissure, the bottom being thirty feet below the level of the prairie. An observer would have imagined that some mighty water-spout might have washed it out; yet the sides were nearly perpendicular, and overgrown with shrubs and clinging vines, there being but one place at the "wash-out," where an easy ascent to the prairie could be made.

Quick-Shot could not help contemplating what an admirable buffalo-trap it could be turned into!

But where was Grit?

The horse, with every hair singed from it, lay dead a few yards away, a sickening mass to gaze at—but Grit was nowhere to be seen.

Had what discovery was this?

The horse had, before the fatal plunge, worn a bridle.

Now, that article was not to be seen, and it was certain that the fire could not have consumed the bits, even if it had burned the leather.

There remained, then, but one reasonable theory: some one had entered the arroyo, carried away the bridle, and likewise Grit Gleason.

With an effort that cost him great pain, Little Quick-Shot arose from his recumbent position, and he bled toward the low place where egress from the pit was easiest—a sort of natural trail that wound up the side to the prairie.

Here he found the plain imprints of a horse's feet, and the indications were that the animal had recently galloped up the trail.

"By Heaven! that brave girl shall not remain lost very long," the Scarlet Scout gritted. "She imperiled her own safety for her love for me, and I'll never rest until I set her at liberty. I don't feel very active after that tough ride and tumble, but I can still follow a trail."

Without delay, he ascended the path to the prairie above, and found that the trail did not lead toward Daggersville or the Cottonwoods, as he had expected, but on the contrary, pointed off to the extreme eastward.

"I owe more to her than to them, there!" he muttered, his gaze wandering in the direction of Daggersville. "I reckon they're all through fighting, anyhow, by this time, no matter who came out victorious; so I'll take this trail and follow it until I lose it or find Grit. Strange! Her relation to Lenore causes me now to take a deeper interest in her than I at first supposed I could."

Weapons he had none, except a clasp-knife in his pocket; but nothing daunted, he set out as rapidly over the trail as the bruised condition of his limbs would permit.

He traveled until nightfall with scarcely a pause, and being a sturdy walker, covered a good many miles.

Being hungry by this time, he corralled a fish in a small prairie stream, and building a fire of such material as he could find, he soon had a palatable supper ready.

After eating it, he remembered that, the sky being clear, there would be a nearly-full moon to light the prairie, so concluded to continue on his journey a while longer, as the trail was plainly visible and easy to follow.

The prospect ahead, however, was not cheering. One vast ocean of slightly undulating prairie, for miles and miles, with not a tree or bush in sight, not to mention a human residence.

Yet Quick-Shot knew that there were numerous little valleys between him and the horizon, wherein might exist a place of abode, even unknown to the ordinary prairie herder.

So he continued on his way, as soon as the moon was fairly up, and did not pause until near midnight, when he felt too fatigued to proceed further, and threw himself upon the ground.

It did not trouble him to get asleep, and he slept for several hours—at least, the moon had disappeared in a bank of clouds near the horizon, and a grayish gloom overhung the prairie.

Something had aroused the Scarlet Scout from his slumber. He was sensible of the fact, but, for the life of him, could not tell what it was. He raised himself on his elbow, and looked around him, keenly, but could see nothing that should have startled him from his slumber.

He lay down again, but an uneasy feeling caused him to partly raise once more, and make another survey.

This time he uttered a startled cry!

He saw something that elicited it, and would have startled any strong-minded personage.

A trifle above the level of the ground, not a dozen yards away, he beheld the Dead Face looking toward him, white and unearthly, and apparently attached to no body.

"Well, I'll be hanged," was the Scarlet Scout's mental ejaculation, "if here isn't a go, in earnest! Wonder what I've done, that I should be haunted by a cadaver, or whatever the thing is?"

The specter, if such it was, remained motionless in the one position. The eyes were closed, as though sealed by the hand of death, and the face retained its corpse-like expression.

Little Quick-Shot watched the thing for several minutes, ere he made up his mind what to do.

"If that ain't human, it's certainly inhuman," he muttered. "If it's the latter, I reckon I'd have hard work to capture it. If human, I'm dashed if I wouldn't like to know what the individual wants. If I can't more than hail him, I may be able to make out what for thing he is. Hello, there!"

Clear and distinct the scout-detective's voice sounded on the night air.

Instantly the Dead Face arose higher, and a man's form became outlined, as it fled from the spot—a man's form clad in deepest black, from chin to toe.

"Very ghostly!" Quick-Shot gritted. "So that's the thing that's been frightening the Daggers-villains! Wonder if I hadn't better give him a chase?"

He leaped to his feet, and bounded away in pursuit, but was soon surprised, to think that he should ever have laid claims to being a runner, for in a very few minutes the Dead Faced individual had vanished, beyond the range of his vision.

"Flame it! I've lost both the man and the trail!" he growled, pausing when he saw that it was no use to proceed further. "I shall have to wait till daybreak, before I can readily pick up that trail again."

He sat down, in an ill-humor, and waited. Ten minutes had scarcely passed, when, hearing a rustling behind him he wheeled around, and beheld the Dead Face a few yards away, and in the same position as when he first discovered it.

With a yell of anger, he sprang to his feet, and rushed toward the ghostly tormentor, only to see that personage also gain his footing, and glide away into nothingness.

"Oh! had I only a revolver or rifle!" Quick-Shot growled, when forced to pause again, more provoked than was his wont to get.

"That dough-faced galoot evidently knows how I am fixed, and is having a little fun to himself, at my expense. One thing appears certain—there's no use of my spending my breath in chasing him."

Nor was he likely to, as he full well comprehended, the next moment, when he was seized from behind

by a number of pairs of hands, which made quick work of securely binding and blindfolding him.

Who his captors were he could not form an idea, as he saw none of them, and not a word was spoken.

That the Dead Face was concerned in the proceeding, however, he did not have a doubt.

He was bound across a saddle, face downward, and carried away, the horse apparently being led, by one of the captors.

It seemed, to Quick-Shot, an age before they stopped, and he was taken from the horse's back, and placed upon his feet.

He was not unbound, however, nor was the thick cloth removed from over his eyes.

He felt a pistol-muzzle pressed to his temple, and knew something important was about to happen—perhaps death, to him.

There was a moment of painful suspense; then a harsh, stentorian voice cried:

"Donald Waverly, do you know where you are?"

"I have not that pleasure!" Quick-Shot retorted, coolly.

"Then, I will grant you the information!" the speaker said, in an impressive tone. "You are in the presence of a band of avengers—persons who have suffered terrible wrongs, and failing to get justice in any other way, have taken the law into their own hands."

"Go ahead!" Quick-Shot called out, indifferently.

"There are five of us, at present!" the speaker went on, "and I, the 'Dead Face,' as I am best known, am the chief of the band. Of my wrongs I need not speak, for they are known only to myself, and to my God. The others, with one exception, have suffered through the agency of one, Cap. Melton, a chief of cattle-thieves."

"I understand."

"Well, we want one more member to our order, before we proceed to business. We know you have suffered a grievous wrong, and have sworn a vow of vengeance, against one whom it is our business to drag down to the doom he richly merits."

"You speak of General Gleason."

"I do. He has wronged, not only all of us, but has massacred many a good man at the Cottonwoods and Daggersville, of which places he now holds undisputed possession. He stands a tyrant king, in a civilized government, and it is a reproach on all honorable humanity that the accursed outlaw is not swept from the earth. We have agreed among ourselves to do the job, and want your co-operation in helping us to restore right from wrong, at Daggersville, and breaking up the Cattle Clique!"

"Supposing you inform me whom I would be associated with. I could best answer you then!"

"That is out of the question. I know it is better for the present that you should not. I have named the other four, Norman, Warren, Gorman and Florence. You are well known and respected by two of them; the others have deits to cancel with Cap. Melton, but are sworn to help us throughout."

"Exactly. But I would be excused."

"Why?"

"Because I have another mission!"

"The search for Gertrude Gleason?"

"Yes."

"Have you so soon forgotten Lenore?"

"By no means! Miss Gertrude rashly imperiled her life through a desire to accompany me, and she having got into trouble it is my duty as a man to rescue her."

"Then set your heart at rest in that respect, for Gertrude Gleason is in the stronghold of Cap. Melton, a prisoner, and the first act on our programme will be to rescue her, and add her to our league."

"If I don't join you?"

"You will be held a prisoner until our vengeance is complete, be it a day or ten years!"

Quick-Shot reflected.

The incidents of the past few days arose vividly before him. The sufferings not alone of himself, but many—the oath of vengeance he had silently taken over Lenore's body—all, came like a phantom before his vision.

"I will join you on conditions!" he said finally.

"Name them, sir."

"They are that I will not be requested to take part in any affair, other than the one I have to avenge, more than to help to run the others to bay."

"Accepted! Listen to the oath. Repeat it word for word, after me!"

The Dead Face then said over a vow of allegiance, and the Scarlet Scout repeated it after him, sealing the oath with a draught of something held to his lips, in a cup, which nearly sickened him, for it was like unto blood!

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETRIBUTION.

As soon as the oath was administered, the bandage was removed from Little Quick-Shot's eyes and his bonds were cut.

He found himself in the presence of five persons in full flowing black gowns, belted at the waist, while each wore a *pier-mo-he* head-covering designed to represent his Satanic Majesty, with horns and all.

Quick-Shot surveyed them with a grim smile.

"Well, you have left nothing undone, in the way of self-adornment, I see!" he said. "A glimpse of you ought to be punishment enough for any ordinary sinner."

"Perhaps!" the tallest of the five said, with a chuckle, his voice unmistakably that of Dead-Face. "We mean to make our appearance an omen of doom to those we are to chase down. Here is a bundle of apparel to match ours, and weapons of defense. Please equip yourself, and then we will get down to business, as fast as is judicious."

In a short time Little Quick-Shot was arrayed in the new costume, and armed with weapons enough to lay out a score of men, had he the hands to use them.

Through the "devil" masks, were eyeholes, and mouth slits for breathing, with projecting forked tongues, that could be manipulated from the inside by the wearer's tongue.

"Now, then, you are all fixed!" the Dead Face announced. "A finer looking six avengers, would be hard to pick up on these prairies. You are an experienced frontiersman, Donald Waverly. Can you tell us where we are now?"

Little Quick-Shot looked about him, with a discerning eye.

They were, apparently, still in mid-prairie, the only object higher than grass, in view, being themselves and a half-dozen saddle horses, near by.

"I reckon you have got me, as I am literally a stranger in these parts, and not familiar with any particular topographical landmark!" Quick-Shot confessed. "I should judge, however, from what I can remember of my trip, that Daggersville lies somewhere about thirty-five miles to the northwest."

"You could not well have guessed with accuracy. But come! let us mount and be off. We have a number of miles to ride, yet."

The mount was made, and they struck off at a gallop, in a northerly direction, never drawing rein, until the sun had set, and dense shadows were settling like a pall over the prairie.

Then they paused at the brink of a narrow winding arroyo, or prairie water gully, the bottom of which lay fully twenty feet. The bottom, singularly enough, was almost choked with a forest of pines grown so closely together that it resembled a jungle. A narrow bridle-path led down into the depths of this wood.

A column of smoke curling up through the tree-tops was the only sign to indicate that the grove was inhabited.

"There's where the Cattle Clique have their headquarters!" Dead Face explained, pointing down into the arroyo. "They've got a big shanty in among the trees, and there's a nest full of the cusses in it."

"Do you know how many?" Quick-Shot asked.

"No. It depends altogether whether any of the gang are away on a raid. If the full force is at headquarters, there are high about fifty of them."

"Then, what business have we got trying to attack them? They'd soon make short work of us!"

"That all depends on how we get at them, sir. I will leave you here, and go down for a reconnaissance. If I make any discoveries worth reporting, I will be back shortly. If not, you had better make a careful search for me."

"All right. We will allow you half an hour to get back in!" Quick-Shot remarked.

The chief then dismounted and leaving his horse with the others, descended the bridle-path on foot, soon losing himself from view among the trees.

Quick-Shot and the others waited.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, and darkness had once more settled upon the prairie. Then Dead Face came up out of the valley, carrying an Indian youth on his shoulders, who was securely bound.

"Well, where did you catch on to that?" Quick-Shot demanded, as the chief deposited the prisoner upon the ground.

"Down yonder. He's your mutton!"

"Why so?"

"For the simple reason that he is a go-between for the League, and knows all the ringleaders. He just brought news to the stronghold that an entire party, numbering all but four of the Clique, were yesterday captured by soldiers who are advancing upon Daggersville."

"Then we shall have an easy victory below?"

"No!" Dead Face said. "There is nothing more to do down there. I spared the red-skin because he promised to turn State's evidence against the others."

"But, Miss Gleason—where is she?" Quick-Shot asked.

"Coming up the path behind me. Ah! here she comes, now. Look! yonder goes the stronghold of the Cattle Clique, with everything in it, except what money I could find!"

He pointed down into the grove with a laugh of triumph, just as Grit Gleason reached the top of the path, leading a horse.

A bright light could be seen below, that increased momentarily, until forked tongues of fire leaped up through the tree-tops, with a crackling sound.

Without speaking, the party watched the flames for some time; then, at Dead Face's order, they all mounted, and rode away.

The declaration of Cap. Melton, that he was Gideon Gleason's son, as narrated in a previous chapter, caused the general to turn whiter than ever, while a furious curse escaped his lips.

"You lie—you lie!" he gasped.

"I do not," Melton replied, triumphantly. "I can prove that we are wife and son to you. Lenore is not your child, or rather was not."

"How do you know?"

"We do know. You adopted her from an asylum, after you had deserted us, and left us upon the world to look after ourselves. Not long since, you learned, through that scalawag McIntosh, that Lenore was of good parentage, and was shortly to come into an immense fortune in the South. You two rogues put your heads together to get possession of the fortune, by arranging a marriage between McIntosh and Lenore. Luckily for the poor girl, she was spared such a fate."

"Ay! and accursed be he who murdered her!" the general cried, bitterly.

"Why heap curses upon yourself? It will not drive away the phantom that ever haunts you. But, enough of that. We could make you suffer on more than one charge, but don't propose to do that, if we can arrange terms."

"Terms!"

"Exactly. Listen, and I will explain. My little business of cattle-thief has gone up. The cavalry has struck me hard by capturing my men and burning my stronghold. They are likewise now after me. I therefore propose to retire from business in such a way as to not be obliged to bother my brains about lucre, henceforth. I mean that you shall help me to do it. I have, here, one hundred thousand dollars in cash, and the marriage-certificate. You put up an equal sum of money, and we will play a game of cards. If I lose, I am broke, and will put up my life against another purse of money."

"If you win?"

"You still have a chance to gamble as long as your cash holds out, and even to putting up your other property. You see in that respect you have an immense advantage over us; you can gamble for hours, while we can only play until we lose both money and life."

"Supposing I refuse to do anything of the kind?"

"Then, before we leave this house, you are a dead man, as sure as I am your son!"

"I will play. If you lose, you shall pay the forfeit, depend upon it. The world cannot hold us both."

"I am perfectly willing to do so."

The general went to his safe, and returned with several large rolls of money, and a deck of cards.

The game was to be eucher.

"Cut for deal!" Gleason said, as they seated themselves at a table.

"If you please, gents, I'll take a hand in that game, too!" a strange voice said.

The startled trio gazed toward the door in alarm. What strange transformation was this?

Was it retribution?

Eleven persons stood in a row, just within the room, each grasping a revolver in his right hand.

Seven of them were attired as the demon avengers. The remaining four were Old Man Ronald, Major Greer, and the two other men who had been held as Gleason's prisoners.

Gideon Gleason trembled like an aspen at sight of the ominous line—each one of whom, he doubted not, had some deadly account to settle with him.

Cap. Melton uttered a savage oath, but made no motion to fight or escape. He saw that the odds were too largely against him, and he could but tremble, when he caught the stern, menacing gaze of Old Man Ronald.

It had been Dead Face, who had spoken.

"My money is good as any one's!" he continued, drawing forth a roll of bills, and advancing to the table. "So be kind enough to deal me out a hand. I know the terms of the game, and am satisfied to abide by them."

The general and his wicked son exchanged glances, and the game began.

Four hands were played, and the Dead Face went out, leaving the game between Melton, and the general.

They played the hand out quickly, and the general, too, went out!

Melton grew pale, but dealt the cards, with apparent determination to win.

"My life or forty thousand this time!" he gritted. The Dead Face raked in forty thousand, and left twenty on the board.

The general made his stake, and the game began, the table surrounded by the avengers, who watched with breathless interest.

The Dead Face went out on the fourth hand again, leaving Melton to play off with his father, again.

Both handled the cards nervously; both were pale and trembling.

There was an audible murmur in the room when the general made a eucher, and won by two points.

For an instant there was a deathlike silence—then Melton's mother suddenly placed a revolver to her son's head, and fired.

"You shall never kill him!" she hissed, addressing the general. "He was a son to me, and we will die together!"

Before she could be prevented, she placed the pistol to her own temple and fired.

The two fell to the floor almost simultaneously. The bullet did not produce death for Melton, for several minutes, and he gazed about him.

"It's all up with me!" he said. "I ask the forgiveness of them I've wronged. You've won, old man, but I reckon we'll meet, at headquarters. My last request—bury mother."

"It shall be done!" Dead Face said, "and to relieve your mind of one sin, sir, I will tell you that you did not kill Ralph Ronald. I brought him back to life, and he is present, now!"

At a motion, one of the party removed his mask, and, sure enough, Ralph Ronald stood revealed!

A look of relief passed over Melton's face, and his lamp of life went out, even as Old Man Ronald and his son embraced each other.

General Gleason still sat at the table, like one in a daze, as he nervously fingered the cards.

The Dead Face once more turned to him.

"Gideon Gleason!" he said, sternly, "Your unfortunate wife and son have paid the penalty of their crimes. You are even a greater criminal than were they, and you too must answer. We will go on with the game!"

"I have but fifty thousand dollars left," the general said, doggedly.

"Maybe not, but you have the deeds to your own

ranch, and you have your cattle. We will gamble for all! You need not produce the fraudulent deeds of your brother's estate, for they are no account!"

"Then, we will gamble for my own, eh? Very well. If I lose it, I will still have the other."

"We will gamble for yours alone. By investigation, it has been proven that your brother's estate was not incumbered a cent's worth, and you have no legal claim to it; therefore, it reverts to his daughter. When you have lost all, you must stake your life against the whole, which, if you win, you shall have undisputed possession of. If you lose, of course your life pays the forfeit. We will play first for fifty thousand dollars a side; secondly for your real estate against my hundred thousand; thirdly, your personal estate against my hundred thousand, and lastly your life against the whole results of our games."

"You evidently calculate to win every game!" the general sneered.

"I shall try to."

"If I refuse to play?"

"I will then leave it to my companion avengers, to devise the most excruciating plan for putting you out of this world."

"Curse you! be you man or devil, I'll chance you on the cards, since I see no other way of escape."

"I am a man in some things—a devil in others. I warned you of my coming. You should have heeded my chemically prepared letter!" and the strange being laughed, strangely. "But, let's get down to business. I would be through with it as soon as possible! Have you a fresh pack of cards?"

The cards were produced, shuffled, dealt, and the game of seven-up—for it was mutually agreed to play that game—began.

The bodies of Melton and his mother had been removed, and those most interested of the party crowded about the table, eagerly.

It was to be a game for life or death—or, more properly, the first of a series of games.

The general was a fine player, or had been in his day, and still prided himself that he could beat the ordinary run of players.

That the Dead Face could play, one did not want better evidence than to watch him. His movements and whole demeanor were those of a cool and easy-going man of the world.

The cards of either player came down upon the table with force, the thumping of the men's fists making the table fairly dance upon the floor.

Not a word was uttered—every one was too much interested in the game to speak.

Point after point was made on either side until the game stood three and three.

In the next hand the general made two points and Dead Face one.

The next hand would decide it.

It was played, and Dead Face won, and hauled in the general's pile to add to his own, with a quiet chuckle.

"Produce your title deeds," he said.

Strangely composed for one of his fiery temperament, the general obeyed.

Dead Face examined the documents, and wrote out an order of transfer to Gertrude Gleason, which the general signed.

Both papers were then placed on the money.

The cards were shuffled and dealt, and the second game began.

Gleason had regained something of his old color, and appeared to play as if not particular whether he lost or won.

"You play a very strong game!" he remarked. "I do not happen to know you; but, whoever you are, I fancy I have played with you before now."

"Undoubtedly!" the Dead Face replied. "At least, I reckon you will be convinced by the time you are through with me."

"If you intend that as a menace, let me tell you I am not afraid of you."

"Oh! perhaps not!"

The game went on.

Finally they stood tie at two points.

The next hand Dead Face went out.

"Good!" the general said, calmly. "Go ahead, and draw up a bill of sale for one dollar, of all my personal property."

It was done, and the general signed it cheerfully. The third game began.

The result was the same.

Gideon Gleason had lost everything but his life.

He still was calm.

"Go ahead. We have the fifth game to play yet," he said, lighting a cigar, and blowing a cloud of smoke into the air.

"If I lose my life may I have the honor of knowing who is to take it?"

"That will be decided by cards between the six of us who have masks. Six cards will be dealt, and the one who receives the ace will be required to pronounce your doom and execute the sentence."

"Very well. My only request is that I may be buried in a coffin as becomes a gentleman. Proceed."

Again the cards were dealt and the game commenced.

With bated breath the watchers awaited the result.

It was evident that each man played his best.

The game came down to close points—one to one!

But fate did not grant that the general should have a winning hand, and he threw down the cards with a bitter oath.

"I have lost!" he said, arising and folding his arms across his breast. "Devil that you represent, devil you are. You have, however, won honorably and my life is at your disposal. Do your work and keep me not in suspense."

Dead Face re-shuffled the cards and called all of

his "Satan"-hooded companions to the table, young Ronald having re-donned his mask.

"I will now deal you cards!" the Dead Face said. "You all know the enormity of this man's crimes. The majority of you very likely are ready to give him the justice he deserves. Be that as it may, the one who draws an ace shall have the power to dispose of the general according to agreement, and we, the remainder of the avengers, are to abide by the decision and abet the one that makes it in whatsoever way the decider may wish. Do you all understand?"

"Ay! ay!" came the response.

"Very good. I will now deal you each a card, with faces up, until one of you receives an ace."

The Dead Face dealt himself the first card, it being the king of hearts.

To the next one to him he dealt the jack of spades; to the next the eight of clubs; to the next the ace of spades.

"Remove your mask and pronounce your victim's fate!" the Dead Face commanded, evident disappointment in his voice.

The mask was removed.

A cry of surprise escaped nearly every lip.

There stood Lenore!

"Silence!" Dead Face ordered. "I will explain: first, Lenore was not dead when she was buried. I dug her up and brought her to life precisely as I did Ralph. Being a skilled physician I did what the world would pronounce impossible. Before you stands the proof of my skill. Lenore, proceed."

General Gleason stood leaning against the mantle, a picture of shame, misery, and death—for there was not a tinge of color in his cheeks; his eyes had an awful stare.

"Hold!" Dead Face added. "Before you, allow me to speak, and let no one under any circumstances interrupt me. Gideon Gleason, you are looking at me. I think you know me. I will remove my mask. There! I am now the Dead Face of Daggersville. See! I remove a thin film skin—now, I am your wronged brother. Gideon, you robbed me of a home. That is naught. You took me from a small-pox bed, and buried me alive, all except my head, where the buzzards could pick my eyes out. I escaped, and when you found, in after months, a grinning skull, where I was planted, you considered yourself safe. Of those who helped you in your heinous crime, there were a dozen. They are all dead. You alone remain. Lenore, I have done. You can now tell the general his fate!"

"I do not think it is necessary!" Lenore returned, with a quivering lip. "I believe a greater avenger than we, has relieved us of the job. Quick!"

Several sprung forward and caught the sinful man, as he would have pitched to the floor.

When they laid him upon the sofa, his last spark of life had ebbed out.

But few words are required to finish our tale.

The trio—father, mother and son were buried, side by side.

A few days later, a company of cavalry raided Daggersville, and put to flight those who had participated in the massacre.

Flat Nose was captured, but on promising to do better, was sent to an agency, along with his daughter, whom Quick-Shot restored to him.

Old Man Ronald took possession of his estate; the general's brother divided the consolidated Gleason estate between himself and Lenore, and Major Greer returned to his Cinnamon Bear, where he for years remained mine host—and would you believe it, Grit Gleason became "mine hostess!"

Donald Waverly, our Little Quick-Shot (which latter name he had inherited from his father), and Lenore, so startlingly reunited, lived at Villa Voselle, until a few years since.

Ralph Ronald returned to the East, where he is now, a rich man.

Buck Brady had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him, but it is probable that under a new name the hardened scoundrel pursued his hardened career to its end in other regions.

Daggersville is no more, but in its place stands a thriving town of another name.

THE END.

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